finishing touches on his speech introducing an unprecedented two-day open-door "conference on inflation." Eight hundred invited guests including the nation's top economists from both parties, and more than 1,200 onlookers and reporters jammed the International Ballroom at the Hilton Hotel in Washington as if Mick Jagger were about to give a graduate seminar. A certain degree of partisanship ensued. Right-wing economists recommended ending the U.S. Postal Service's monopoly on first-class mail, the Davis-Bacon Act mandating fair wages on government construction projects, and certain other federal regulations; labor-aligned economists asked Ford to keep wage and price controls. More extraordinary, however, was the thing on which the economists agreed. It was named by a brand-new word, one that would haunt the rest of the decade: *stagflation*.

Paul Samuelson, the 1970 winner of the Nobel Prize for economics and author of the field's definitive textbook, had twenty years earlier made a famous description of the triumphs of Keynesian economic science: "By the proper choice of monetary and fiscal policy we as the artists, mixing the colors of our palette, can have the capital formation and rate of current consumption that we desire." The formulation was translated into layman's terms by no less than Richard Nixon, in his 1969 inauguration speech: "We have learned at last to manage a modern economy to ensure its continued growth." It was one of those rare things in politics, a genuine consensus. It was, in fact, one of the reasons there existed a Nobel Prize for economics, first bestowed in 1969—the formerly dismal science's reward for devising an intellectual endeavor that seemed genuinely to maximize the public good for all.

Until, that is to say, these mid-1970s, when the economy stopped growing, and, as with a car thrown into neutral, furious application of all the old managerial tools brought no solution at all.

At his turn at the apex of the giant U-shaped table at the Hilton, Samuelson tried to explain why—though he wasn't too certain himself. It used to all be so simple: Economists knew that inflation and economic growth had a simple inverse relation. That if the economy stagnated, the Federal Reserve could loosen the money supply, or Congress could induce government spending, and the economy would speed back to health. Or if inflation was the problem, the economy could be cooled into balance by checks on government spending or by increased taxes—such as the income surtax Ford had proposed earlier that month. But that trade-off no longer worked, the bow-tied Democratic economist explained: "Our number one problem is 'stagflation'"—stagnation and inflation, simultaneously. Which, under the previously prevailing Keynesian theories, could not possibly coexist. But there now was no consensus among economists, nor even any promising theory, about what to do.

Sure, Ford could increase taxes or cut spending to rein in inflation—and throw maybe a million American out of work in an election year. Or he could goose the economy, perhaps by releasing funds for public works—but then inflation might skyrocket out of control. This new presidency was evolving a theme: damned if he did, damned if he didn't.

There is a story that Franklin Delano Roosevelt was once asked what book he wished every Soviet could own. He answered, "The Sears, Roebuck catalogue." Indeed, since Roosevelt, Americans' inflation-adjusted incomes had doubled. Manufacturing wages had tripled. The specter haunting social criticism had been what human beings would do with all the free time American prosperity was producing. No more. Poor Gerald Ford, saddled with the blame. It was around this time that the new issue of *National Lampoon* hit the newsstands with the president showing an ice-cream cone three inches north of his mouth.

POLITICIANS STARTED JOCKEYING FOR SPACE INSIDE THE PRESIDENT'S head before an economic speech scheduled for a joint session of Congress on October 7. Reagan sent him a telegram: "Dear Mr. President, I am concerned that the press reports indicate you will propose tax increases tomorrow in an effort to curb inflation. The 1972 election mandate was clear: no new taxes for four years, and reduce the size of the federal government. . . ." Congressman Wilbur Mills of Arkansas, who had amassed nearly biblical powers chairing the tax-writing Ways and Means Committee for a record eighteen years, gave a Democratic version of the same argument, releasing a statement pronouncing himself "unalterably opposed to an income tax surcharge which places its heaviest burden on the lower and middle-income classes."

The lame-duck right-wing governor could be ignored—but not, traditionally, someone like Mills. Here was the way Washington worked: long-serving congressmen and senators, almost always from the South, where elections were not quite democratic and incumbents had about as much chance of losing as they did of sprouting wings (Mills had been a congressman since 1939), leveraged their seniority into chairmanships of the committees that powered Congress like an engine room on a ship. And, like those engine rooms, the work they did was hidden from view, in backroom "markup" sessions in which power brokers from both parties drafted world-changing legislation via bonds of trust sealed with toasts of bourbon and branch water. When done right, in the old-fashioned way, the bills arrived on the floor "clean"—not amendable—and were passed by unrecorded vote, by obedient junior members directed by equally powerful "whips." Whips who left scars on those who dared disobey.

Wilbur Mills was at the apex of that system; his committee was invariably described in newspapers as the "powerful Ways and Means Committee," and he himself as "the most powerful man in Washington." But maybe now Mills could be defied. He was facing his first serious primary challenger, who was hitting him hard on the main issue that mattered this campaign season, that he'd accepted dirty money during his short-lived 1972 presidential run—"Wilbur's Watergate," the *New Republic* called it.

And then, in the same AP story announcing his displeasure with the surtax, came this: "Mills has been in seclusion since an incident early Monday when according to police his auto was stopped by police because it was traveling at a high speed with its lights off."

Washington insiders already knew it was quite more than that—and soon the rest of the world would know, too: that a not-so-young woman with Barbra Streisand curls by the name of Annabelle Battistella, Mills's next-door neighbor, had dashed out of the car in a bruised, drunken panic and leaped in apparent embarrassment into Washington, D.C.'s lovely Tidal Basin. And that her professional name, when she danced at the Silver Slipper topless lounge, was "Fanne Foxe, the Argentine Firecracker."

Jerry Ford tucked his surtax proposal, limited to Americans with incomes over fifteen thousand dollars, at the very end of his speech to the joint session of Congress that afternoon. He didn't like raising taxes; nor did he like the notion of liberals that all would be solved with $4 billion in new public works projects, nor their clamoring for new price controls. In fact, despite the honeymoon claims that this was a man beyond ideology, his economic conservatism was bone deep. As a congressman between 1970 and 1973 he followed the preferred course of Americans for Democratic Action, the liberal group, on only four votes. As president he chose as chairman of his Council of Economic Advisers free-market advacate Alan Greenspan—who was sworn in for the job standing next to his mentor, the hyper-free-market advocate Ayn Rand. And though Gerald Ford despised Ronald Reagan, when he went out to stump for Republican candidates later that month, you could hardly tell them apart: "We have to chop off these tentacles," he would say. "And as each of these tentacles withers, we have to return the power and the

revenues they have grasped back to the states and localities where they belong."

That conservatism helped explain why he fell in love with an idea from economics columnist Sylvia Porter. She said that "consumers now are as eager to help combat inflation as we were eager to help fight Nazism." Wisconsin's Democratic senator Gaylord Nelson, founder of Earth Day, gave the notion a bipartisan tinge with similar language at the inflation summit.

What if inflation could be fought by individual citizen action? What if Ford could *jawbone* the nation out of its price funk?

His economics speech began with a banquet of bland policy proposals ("for the long range we must work harder on coal gasification"). He had been stumbling. Then the fun began. "My fellow Americans," he said, "ten days ago I asked you to get things started by making a list of ten things to fight inflation and exchange your list with neighbors, and to send me a copy."

He warmed to his subject.

"I have personally read scores of the thousands of letters received at the White House, and incidentally, I have made my economic experts read some of them too." They "showed me that a great deal of patriotic determination and unanimity already exists in this great land": cut kitchen waste by 5 percent, carpool, take the bus, ride bikes, walk; "share everything you can and a little bit more." He smiled folksily: "We can share burdens as we can share blessings."

The Nixon administration had suggested similar things during the food price explosion of the spring of 1973 ("*liver, kidney, brains, and heart can be made into gourmet meals with seasoning, imagination, and more cooking time*"). Nixon himself said them in his energy crisis speech in the fall ("*How many times have you gone along the highway or the freeway, whatever the case may be . . . cars with only one individual in that car?*"). They hadn't worked then. But, then, Richard Nixon hadn't had a nifty little prop.

The White House had approached a Madison Avenue advertising agency, which came up with the slogan: Whip Inflation Now. WIN. Forty-two minutes into the address, Ford explained how "a very simple enlistment form" would appear in the next day's newspapers. At that, the president pointed out in his lapel, next to his red-white-and-blue tie, the snazzy little button designed by the same guy who invented the yellow "smiley face."

"It bears the single word: WIN. I think that tells it all. I call upon every American to join in this massive mobilization and stick with it until we do win as a nation and a people."

He took the pin off and held it to the cameras. He got a standing ovation.

He promised to share more of the American people's suggestions the next week before the Future Farmers of America in Kansas City. In the interim came an earnest outpouring. He happily relayed examples in Kansas:

"Mrs. Laird Barber of Morris, Minnesota, wants to know if a national program can be organized to collect cans, glass, newspapers.... James Kincaid, of Belleville, Illinois, suggests a new type of government anti-inflation bond.... The Tennants report they do not use credit cards. They put something in their credit union each week and buy a government bond every month.... Robert Stewart writes from Waverly, Tennessee, that he has a heart condition, unfortunately, and draws a pension of only $251.27 a month. This allows him just two meals a day.... He asks me, and again I quote: 'Can we cut our government spending except for national defense?' ... I think his example is a good one for all of us to observe.... From Hillsboro, Oregon, the Stevens family writes they are fixing up their bikes to do family errands."

Many of the ideas came from children. "Clean up your plate before you get up from the table"; "trash inventories"; dig school playgrounds up for "WIN vegetable gardens"; get your haircut at home. "Bob Cantrell, a 14-year-old in Pasadena, California, gave up his stereo to save energy."

WIN was a hit, for now. Golf legend Tom Watson wore his WIN button on the golf course: "It's not a joke. I put it on because I believe in it." (Governor George Wallace put one on, too, though his *was* a joke: "[It stands] for Wallace in November, doesn't it?" he said.) Capitalists did what capitalists do: soon came the WIN gardening tools, WIN paperweights, WIN mugs, pens, watches, hot plates. Meredith Willson, composer of *The Music Man*, wrote a WIN march, and the Marine and Navy bands added it to their repertoires. Two hundred thousand Americans sent in their WIN enlistment forms. Now that the campaign season was upon us, a reeling Republican Party had something to sell: collective obligation, in the key of homespun earnestness.

But a crop of unusual young Democratic candidates had a more salable post-Watergate product: suspicion, and redemption of that suspicion through a narrative of catharsis.

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THE DAY AFTER FORD SPOKE IN KANSAS CITY, HE SPOKE AT A JUDICIARY subcommittee witness table, live on TV. The first president to testify before Congress since George Washington, coming so soon after Richard Nixon had so adamantly refused to do so, it was meant at once to display his openness, to empty out suspicions from the pardon—to end the national nightmare, again. Instead, he was set upon by a fusillade of paranoia.

Elizabeth Holtzman of New York, who had breathed fire at the Nixon impeachment hearings, treated the President of the United States like a criminal defendant. Ford had claimed in his opening statement that the subject of a pardon had never once been "raised by the former president or anyone representing him." Holtzman, after complaining that the short time allotted for grilling him was inadequate to examine the country's "dark suspicions," began listing those suspicions—though she barely got into the first one before the president interrupted:

"I want to assure you, the Congress, and the American people that there was no deal, period, under no circumstances."

He pounded the table. But he did acknowledge that he'd met with Alexander Haig before the resignation to discuss the various possible scenarios. Which only amplified suspicions more.

A Democrat asked how a high school teacher could explain to students how the pardon accorded with the principle of equal justice under law. A Republican, Edward Hutchinson, begged for the harassment to cease: "All reasonable questions," he said, "have been laid to rest." *Washington Post* columnist William Raspberry responded, "There is no way that last Thursday's namby-pamby session ... could have eased anyone's doubts."

In other news from the paranoia front, the vice-president-designate Nelson Rockefeller fended off the most stringent confirmation process in the history of the republic, practically a Watergate-scale hearing in itself, over distrust that the billions in business interests he controlled would be put into a truly blind trust. Spokesmen for the disgraced former president, meanwhile, insisted Nixon couldn't testify in the Watergate cover-up trial beginning in Washington because of another outbreak of phlebitis. How convenient. A suspicious *Newsweek* cover asked, "How Sick Is Nixon?"

Sorry, Representative Hutchinson: the powers that be being perfectly rotten, the questions were only beginning.

"Establishment institutions in America are in deep trouble," pollster Lou Harris said in his September 30 newspaper column. Incumbent

Republicans were bearing the brunt. Hutchinson, whose Michigan district had been represented by a Democrat for precisely two years since 1884, faced the run of his political life. As did all his Republican Judiciary Committee colleagues. Wiley Mayne of Iowa, a congressman who sometimes had supported Nixon and sometimes had not, woke up to find his opponent braying that he'd acted "more like a defense lawyer for Nixon than like a representative of the people." Mayne's opponent promised to determine his votes in Congress through plebiscites taken in town halls in the district—and rocketed ahead in the polls. In New Jersey, where two-thirds of voters disapproved of the pardon, Charles Sandman, the congressman whose anti-impeachment ranting had reminded Teddy White of Joe McCarthy, desperately implored voters to accept that since he had switched his vote on articles of impeachment at the last minute, nothing he said before that should count.

A New Jersey lawmaker estimated that Republican candidates had gained 20,000 automatic votes when Nixon resigned—then lost 10,000 when he was pardoned. A Gallup poll said generic Democratic candidates beat generic Republicans by a margin of 54 to 35. The ratio of Democrats to Republicans in the 93rd Congress was already 235 to 182, and the Democratic National Committee was targeting an eye-popping one hundred seats more for turnover.

The *Time* magazine on the newsstands when Ford spoke on Capitol Hill predicted a Democratic landslide. But it also stressed something else: the people who'd won this year's Democratic nominations were an odd brand of Democrats. For many, this wasn't the just the first time they'd run in a campaign, but the first time they had worked in a campaign. They campaigned, almost, on their contempt for the body they sought to join. "I am running for Congress because I believe the Congress must be reformed," said thirty-four-year-old Tim Wirth of Colorado. And, like that fellow in Michigan, Vander Veen, they seemed almost militantly indifferent to partisanship. Thirty-six-year-old Gary Hart, running in Colorado for the Senate after managing George McGovern's 1972 presidential campaign, wrote an angry letter complaining that the article called him a liberal. "Traditional 'liberal' and 'conservative' slogans," he wrote, "are simply not adequate to cope."

Their economic ideologies were not traditionally liberal, either. "The best way out" of the energy crisis, Hart said, was not the nationalization of the energy companies, which Democrats like Scoop Jackson were calling for. It "is to work together. There will be a lot more cooperative ventures between the environmentalists and the energy developers." Snaking across Colorado's switchback mountain roads for the past eighteen months, he preached that America had to accept austerity—pledging, like Tom Bradley getting elected mayor in Los Angeles by promising no more freeways, *not* to develop Colorado's coal shale resources. "The party's over, the day of having it all is gone. . . . We're entering a period of history when conspicuous consumption and waste just must end."

Hart was the rock star of the 1974 Democratic candidates. He wore expensive cowboy boots with his silk suits. Not really a populist, he was, however, a reformer: his big campaign play was publishing the names of his opponent's contributors and the amounts they gave. Evans and Novak said Hart's "abandoning abrasive liberal ideology for a bland moderate facade" was actually subterfuge. Clearly they had not read the book he'd published the year before about the McGovern campaign, *Right from the Start*. "American liberalism," he had written in it, was "near bankruptcy." And George McGovern, while he brought into liberal politics the greatest organizers in a generation, "did not bring in a new generation of thinkers. He did not because it isn't there." Hart's billboards read, "They had their turn. Now it's our turn." His outmaneuvered opponent, the once-popular two-term conservative incumbent Peter Dominick, said Hart seemed to be "trying to get to the right of Attila the Hun."

Hart seemed almost angrier at other Democrats than at Republicans. His stock speech, "The End of the New Deal," argued that his party was hamstrung by the very ideology that was supposed to be its glory—that "if there is a problem, create an agency and throw money at the problem." It included lines like "The ballyhooed War on Poverty succeeded only in raising the expectations, but not the living conditions, of the poor." That was false: the poverty rate was 17.3 percent when LBJ's Economic Opportunity Act was passed in 1964 and 11.2 percent as Gary Hart spoke. But such claims did appeal to the preconceptions of people who Hart claimed must become the new base of the Democratic Party: those in the affluent suburbs, whose political power had been quietly expanding during the 1960s through redistricting and reapportionment. He called those who "clung to the Roosevelt model long after it had ceased to relate to reality," who still thought the workers, farmers, and blacks of the New Deal coalition were where the votes were, "Eleanor Roosevelt Democrats." He held them in open contempt.

The legacy of 1972 that Hart was proud of was the commission reforming the presidential nomination process, which McGovern had chaired. By incinerating the role of unions and urban machines, "the party redeemed its promise of access to the Democratic process for those outside the established center" and "regenerated itself with new leadership and new ideas." Like those of his own campaign, which he called "a contest Jefferson himself would welcome"—a purgation of a cynical old aristocracy, including a Democratic Party aristocracy.

This new kind of Democrat was said to care more about "lifestyle issues" like conservation, which blue-collar labor types viewed with distrust. (Hart's simpatico ticket mate for governor, Richard Lamm, came to prominence leading the movement to keep the 1976 Winter Olympics out of Denver, for the sake of the environment.) If anything, the new Democrats wanted smaller government. Michael Dukakis, the suburban Democrat running for governor in Massachusetts against a much more liberal Republican incumbent, was said by the UPI to want to "run the state like a bank." Jerry Brown would quote small-government nostrums he read in the magazines *Commentary* and *Public Interest*—house organs of the ascendant neoconservative movement. Though he came to the same conclusions quoting a bible of the environmental movement: E. F. Schumacher's *Small Is Beautiful: A Study of Economics as If People Mattered* (or, as the cover actually read, *small is beautiful: a study of economics as if people mattered*).

In their allergy to government activism they resembled Wisconsin's Democratic senator William Proxmire, chairman of the Joint Economic Committee, a former investment banker who in an interview in the *New Republic* "fondly allud[ed] to Ricardo, Marshall, and Pigou"—the grandfathers of neoclassical economics. Proxmire listed sixteen federal agencies he'd like to see go the way of all flesh—including the Small Business Administration, the Interstate Commerce Commission (because it "reduced competition" and protected "inefficient producers"), and, even though he was D.C.'s most famous jogger, the President's Council on Physical Fitness (its work "should be left to individuals and private institutions"). He complained of his fellow Democrats, "Say 'spend' and they salivated." "He seemed," the *New Republic's* reporter Thomas Geoghegan marveled, "to invite a taxpayer revolt against government itself." His stock refrain was a Reaganite one: "If you want to get the government off your backs, get your hands out of the government's pockets."

THIS NEW BREED OF DEMOCRATIC CANDIDATE WAS SOON CHRISTENED with a nickname: the Watergate Babies. JFK was their first vote, an indelible touchstone. "I would guess everyone my age remembers 'Ask not what your country can do for you; ask what you can do for your country,'" David Broder quoted one of them, who was twenty-

nine years old, as saying. Another, Norm Mineta, had devoted himself heart and soul to electing the first Catholic president as a rebuke to the prejudice he'd experienced as a Japanese-American who spent part of his childhood in a World War II internment camp. Joining the Kennedy campaign had steered Gary Hart away from a planned career as professor of philosophy and religion.

A remarkable number of Watergate Babies were professors: the thirty-two-year-old Ball State political science prof who ran against Judiciary Committee Republican David Dennis; the Purdue professor, Floyd Fithian, up against Earl "don't confuse me with the facts" Landgrebe; a chaplain on leave from Drexel University. Another of their formative political experiences was fighting against the Vietnam War. For example, an Iowa congressional candidate, Tom Harkin, was among the first to document the U.S.-built "tiger cages" in which our South Vietnamese allies tortured political prisoners. A candidate for the Democratic Senate nomination from New York, Texas-born Ramsey Clark, the son of Truman's right-leaning attorney general, then Supreme Court justice, had traveled to Hanoi in 1972 at the invitation of the Communist Party.

Clark chose as his campaign manager a radical journalist, Victor Navasky, whose last campaign experience was running for high school student government president. Clark limited donations to one hundred dollars a person and refused to hold a press conference to announce his candidacy. He wouldn't spend sixteen thousand dollars for a "benchmark poll" ("How am I to explain to a poor person in Harlem that I had to spend $16,000 for a 'benchmark'?"); he wouldn't rent a cheap campaign office in the Empire State Building because the art deco masterpiece was "a symbol of Rockefeller money"; he had Frank Serpico and one of the leaders of the Attica prison riots put his name in nomination at the state convention. A profile in the left-wing magazine *New Times* (entitled "The Anti-Politician") said it was as if campaign consultants had dreamed up "a candidate that would be positively unelectable": "He's lousy in crowds. Ignores his staff. Is bored by the press. Awkward shaking hands. Death on small talk. Wears suits out of the '50s (the top and bottom seldom match) and, are you ready, *hush puppies*." He shocked the New York Democratic establishment by winning. Then he called his Republican opponent Jacob Javits—who was nearly as liberal as he—a "Nixon thug."

Now, even reformers needed political machines. These couldn't be labor unions—they were part of the ossified aristocracy that got us into this mess in the first place. ("We are not a bunch of little Hubert

Humphreys," Gary Hart said about his young ideological fellow travelers, citing the politician most closely associated with the AFL-CIO.) Instead the reformers had Common Cause, the "citizen's lobby" founded in August 1970 by John Gardner, the Republican former college professor and LBJ's secretary of Health, Education, and Welfare. He said he'd started the group because Washington was "teeming with interest groups. Everybody is organized but the people."

The "people" were not, by this reckoning, blue-collar construction workers perfectly happy to see their twenty-term congressman scratch colleagues' backs in behalf of a project like the Supersonic Transport, the better to create union jobs. Common Cause was proud to have helped kill the SST. Instead, its several hundred thousand mailing-list members were well-educated, often suburban professionals whose most important political issues were reform of congressional processes, public financing of elections, and strict disclosure laws for both corporate and labor donations. Armed with this mailing list Common Cause had scored extraordinary successes both helping get the voting age lowered to eighteen and winning a lawsuit forcing the Committee to Re-elect the President to release the names of its donors—one of the things that had led to the Watergate investigation in the first place.

Their electoral crusade for 1974 was christened "Open Up the System." For it, they recruited six hundred volunteer "steering committee coordinators," 350 "publicity coordinators," and two hundred Washington-based full-time organizers, dedicated to training volunteers in classic campaign techniques. They were joined in their efforts by a media campaign sponsored by the Democratic Study Group, the liberal House caucus founded in 1959 by Eugene McCarthy to break the hold of the Jurassic seniority system, which had bottlenecked progressive legislation for generations. In the late 1960s they turned to fund-raising to elect like-minded colleagues, drafting Hollywood stars like Henry Fonda and Rod Serling as spokesmen. In 1974, they seized on Watergate as their opportunity to pack Congress with reformers to break the back of the seniority system once and for all. The Democratic National Committee kicked in with a surprisingly spirited coordinated effort, with the chairman of its campaign committee, the term-limited Georgia governor Jimmy Carter, surprising all and sundry with the Nixon-like intensity of his travel schedule in what in previous years had been a primarily ceremonial job.

It was working. In October the president added three more states to his homestretch campaign tour. "Whip Inflation Now" was soon seen as a joke and a colossal political failure (a *New York* magazine cover

story titled "Ladies and Gentlemen, the President of the United States" depicted Bozo the Clown on the presidential podium with a giant red "WIN" button in his tweedy lapel). So Ford abandoned his homespun homilies and campaigned by means of right-wing hysteria instead. The "election of these extremists of the Democrats Party," he now said at campaign rallies, would threaten "the survival of the two-party system in the country."

THE WATERGATE BABIES, OVERWHELMINGLY, WON.

Enough Democrats were elected to the House of Representatives to outnumber Republicans in the 94th Congress by a ratio of more than two to one; thirty-one members were holding elective office for the first time. Three new Democratic senators increased the Democrats' margin in the upper chamber, 61 to 39. In a new survey on party identification by Republican pollster Robert Teeter, only 18 percent were willing to associate themselves with the GOP. States traditionally dominated by Republicans were now represented by Democrats: seven out of nine congressmen in Wisconsin, seventeen out of twenty-five in New England, five out of six in Iowa, nine out of eleven in Indiana. Gary Hart scored 23 percentage points more in Colorado than George McGovern had only twenty-four months earlier. Jerry Brown would be governor of California. He was thirty-seven years old. The man he replaced was sixty-four. (Ramsey Clark lost, after Jacob Javits exploited his trip to Hanoi.)

However, what kind of mandate Hart, Brown, and their Watergate Babies possessed was not entirely clear. The chairman of the Democratic National Committee said the victory revitalized "the old Democratic coalition" of FDR. The *New York Times* said Democrats in Congress were confident they could now enact that long-anticipated liberal holy grail: national health insurance. But few of the newly victorious Watergate Babies had even mentioned such New Deal–style legislation on the campaign trail. Vermont elected its first non-Republican senator since the founding of the Grand Old Party in the 1850s, though that senator-elect, Patrick Leahy, said there was "no place for partisanship" in celebrating his victory. A thirty-two-year-old congressman-elect from Michigan, James Blanchard, said, "I'm not entirely sure *what* my political philosophy is." Said Ronald Reagan of the Democratic speeches that fall, "Listening to them I had the eerie feeling we were hearing reruns of Goldwater speeches. I even thought I heard a few of my own."

Then there was the question of whether anyone was interested at all in following these new political leaders—or any sort of leader. Only a third of eligible Americans had bothered to cast a ballot. "Don't vote. It only encourages them," the bumper stickers said. Many of the bumpers that sported it still featured the sticker that popped up after Nixon was pardoned by Ford: "IMPEACH SOMEONE."

THE NEW RIGHT DIDN'T REGISTER IN THE ELECTORAL TALLIES. FOUR RE-turned prisoners of war had won Republican primaries; one, Leo Thorsness, challenging George McGovern, received backing from both the White House and RNC chairman George H. W. Bush and a warm profile as an up-and-comer in the *New York Times*. All lost in the general election.

The New Right registered in the streets and the hollers instead—where the electoral analysts in the media could safely ignore them, or dismiss them as crazies.

In West Virginia the Thursday before Election Day, someone exploded fifteen sticks of dynamite under the gas meter at the school board building just minutes after the superintendent left (he had just announced he would start enforcing truancy laws). Thousands of antitextbook protesters rallied in the Charleston Civic Center, wearing huge stickers reading JESUS WOULDN'T HAVE READ THEM, singing "Amazing Grace" and "We Shall Not Be Moved" and "America the Beautiful," and cheering speeches about starting their own independent school system, given from a podium flanked by Old Glory on one side and a crucifix-emblazoned flag on the other. They shouted that it was time to shovel books into bonfires—a development that tested the limits of Paul Cowan's empathy: "Some of these protesters," he wrote, "were clearly capable of outright totalitarianism."

On November 8 the board voted 4–1 to return the most noncontroversial volumes to the curriculum and let the others be read only with special parental permission. Once more, compromise only poured gas on the flames. Dozens of white men patrolled Campbell Creek with shotguns, following rumors over citizens' band radio that carloads of blacks were on their way to burn churches. The next day school buses were shot at, and a car owned by parents who insisted on sending their kids back to school was blown up. A police cruiser escorting a school bus was punctured by a rifle shot.

In Boston, October ended with a tally of sixteen assaults against teachers. A two-thousand-car cavalcade snarled traffic from Quincy to South Boston. Then activists boycotted Election Day. On Thanksgiving Day, four thousand rallied at East Boston Stadium—replacing the annual Eastie-Southie football game, traditionally the greatest public event of the year, but not this year, because the football season had been canceled. On December 11, a white student was stabbed by a black student at South Boston High. A mob of white parents formed a blockade around the school to trap the black students and made ready to storm the building. Shattering glass; police horses charging. "*Kill the niggers! Kill the niggers!*" "*Niggers eat shit! Niggers eat shit!*" A chorus of mothers led that cheer. President Ford put the 82nd Airborne on alert.

THE ELECTION OF A CONGRESS IN WHICH DEMOCRATS OUTNUMBERED Republicans two to one obscured a simple underlying fact: right-wing culture was not in retreat. You could see it in the ongoing celebration of POW heroes like Jeremiah Denton, now commandant of the Armed Forces Staff College, who on November 19 was awarded the Navy's second-highest decoration, the Navy Cross, for blinking out the letters "T-O-R-T-U-R-E" in Morse code during a 1966 broadcast from North Vietnam he was forced to make. (He also said then to his captors, "I don't know what is happening, but whatever the position of my government is, I support it fully. Whatever the position of my government, I believe in it, yes sir. I am a member of that government, and it is my job to support it, and I will as long as I live"—at which they tortured him yet more brutally, but never tried to use him for propaganda purposes again.) You could see it on the bestseller lists—but only if you knew how to look. A nonfiction thriller called *Alive*, for instance, spent twenty weeks on the *New York Times* list. The yarn about how twenty-nine South American student rugby players survived a plane crash in the frozen remote Andes seemed simply a riveting tale to those trend-spotters, in D.C., in Manhattan, in Hollywood, who didn't understand the subculture that actually was driving the sales: evangelical Christians, enraptured by the fact that the students saw the most dramatic detail of their survival—cannibalism of their dead teammates' preserved, frozen flesh—as, in the words of one survivor, going "back to the source of Christianity." The continued explosion in sales of *The Late, Great Planet Earth* was invisible to those same cultural elites—because the Christian bookstores where many of its readers purchased it were not surveyed for bestseller lists.

The elites paid more attention to the new, second report from the Club of Rome, *Mankind at the Turning Point*, whose mass-market paperback edition announced, "Mankind today stands at the brink of a precipice." It argued that unless worldwide birth control was instituted in the next twenty years, starvation and disease would claim as many people as would be born and that the OPEC-driven explosion in energy prices was a blessing in disguise, because under previous prices fuel would have run out by the end of the century. *Science* magazine found the book's prescriptions "perhaps the only hope we have." *Time* found its plea for "a truly interwoven global economic system in which all nations helped one another for economic gain" a convincing alternative to "mankind's lemming-like rush toward disaster."

The 1968 book *The Population Bomb* was still selling (its worst-case scenario was the destruction of mankind in a nuclear holocaust by 1974; its best case was that America would be reduced to food rationing as most of the Third World fell to famine and anarchy). Paul Ehrlich, along with several other environmentalist writers, including Theodore Roszak, E. F. Schumacher, and Barry Commoner, published an anthology titled *Notes for the Future*. It proposed that precisely the things that were supposed to be the glory of our civilizations—technology, industry, the mastery of nature—were in fact "symptoms of a diseased society." Left-leaning apocalypticism had become a background hum within mainstream politics. Ehrlich himself had become a regular on *The Tonight Show*.

But both *Alive* and *The Late, Great Planet Earth* formed part of the background hum for their readers' politics, too: both books, and many others, argued that the militantly secular culture suppressing the "Christian worldview" foretold a far worse disaster than mere environmental collapse—it foretold the end of the world in fire and brimstone. Other such volumes were more explicitly political—like *The Politics of Pornography*, a selection that fall of the Conservative Book Club, which proposed that "streaking and similar crazes" were part and parcel of the conspiracy to "replace the dominion of God with one that makes man the measure of all things." Its author, Dr. Rousas J. Rushdoony, was a leader of a Christian Reconstructionist movement, which sought to "return" the United States government to biblical law. His 1972 book, *The Messianic Character of American Education*, which argued that "the nuclear family is the basic unit of God's covenant" and that this unit was being deliberately undermined by the education establishment, which worshipped the false messiah of the secular humanist state, was an inspiration for the professional conservatives organizing in Kanawha.

One place you could read about such books was *Christianity Today*—but not in the editorial content, which still took strikingly liberal positions. (The editors were so impressed with the arguments in *All We're Meant to Be: A Biblical Approach to Women's Liberation* that they came out in favor of the Equal Rights Amendment. In their survey of eighty-seven denominational leaders, eight of fourteen Baptist officials supported it, too.) Most of its ministerial readers still stayed away from social issues entirely, hewing to a theologically informed reluctance to get involved in "worldly" concerns, traditional in evangelical circles ever since the humiliations of the 1925 Scopes trial. Instead, the politics of the emerging "Christian right" was most visible in *Christianity Today*'s margins—its literal margins, in the ad columns.

"It is no longer expedient for Christians to be secluded from the mainstream of human events," read an advertisement in the September 13, 1974, issue from the Christian Freedom Foundation, a Buena Park, California, organization underwritten by the fantastically wealthy, right-wing DeVos family of Michigan. "Our country was established on a certain harmony of values preserved by our Christian heritage. As long as the majority of citizens were committed to these basic values, compliance with standards and national stability followed. But now this value consensus is disappearing. The tidal wave of defection from former standards is sweeping away good laws which once held firm. The decline of conscience renders the law ineffectual. The end of self-restraint is paving the way for a breakdown of order itself."

It concluded: "This is not the time for either panic or lethargy; it is time for critical thought, brave commitments and vigorous action motivated by the love of Jesus Christ. It is time for responsible Christians to take a hand in the affairs of state."

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

Watergate Babies

FISHBAIT WAS GONE.

William "Fishbait" Miller had been the official doorkeeper of the House of Representatives since 1949. Sixty-five years old, fat, his straight gray hair parted down the middle and his ties unfashionably thin, he was vaguely recognizable to the country for the magnolia drawl that announced presidents, prime ministers, generals, and queens before joint sessions of Congress. But his post was also an administrative one, for which he was paid $40,000 a year (House members made $42,500), and for which he controlled 340 patronage workers. He got and kept the job as reward for holding the coat of Mississippi reactionary William Colmer since the congressman's first campaign in 1932. He never was particularly good at his job, such as that job was; at one joint session he was supposed to announce a dignitary whose face he couldn't quite recall. A member from Texas whispered to him, "For God's sake, Fishbait, it's the Chief Justice!" He was, instead, the perfect symbol of the Dixiecrats' corrupt control of Capitol Hill. So in a move symbolic of their determination to break that power, the seventy-five new House freshmen voted in a bloc at the first Democratic caucus meeting on December 2, 1974, for his dismissal.

Wilbur Mills had managed to survive his reelection campaign. In December, the morning of the caucus meeting that cashiered Fishbait, the front pages reported that Fanne Foxe, the Argentine Firecracker, made her stripping debut in Boston. The event was newsworthy enough to draw a clutch of political reporters—whose astonishment was visible in the pictures that appeared on the nation's front pages of the eighteen-term solon leaping onstage and joining the show. Such was the image seared in Watergate Babies' retinas as they reported that morning for the first battle in what the *Washington Post* called a "revolution," and *U.S. News & World* Report labeled Washington's "biggest power shake-up in more than a century."

One vote was over who would chair the caucus. The establishment candidate was B. F. Sisk, a sixty-five-year-old eleventh-termer and loyal member of the Rules Committee—in whose back rooms, for decades, power brokers from both parties decided which bills would live and which would die, and how debate over those they granted the gift of life would be systematically limited. "Debate," in fact, was an overstatement; debates almost always took place under the notorious "closed rule," which made it all but impossible to amend a bill on the floor.

Sisk's opponent, Democratic Study Group fixture Phillip Burton, had led a fight to pressure the House Foreign Affairs Committee in 1973 to report out the first bill since the 1920s without a closed rule. The bill called for ending funding in Vietnam by a fixed date. "For the first time, we in DSG have broken through the parliamentary barricades erected by the Republican-Dixiecrat conservative coalition and forcefully condemned the Nixon administration's unnecessary prolongation of this bloody war," Burton gloated then. Now, the Republican-Dixiecrat coalition was in retreat, DSG was in the saddle, and with the votes of almost every one of the freshmen, Phil Burton became chair of the 94th Congress's mighty Democratic caucus.

Then, over the next few days, they got to work reinventing the House. First, they took away from Mills's Ways and Means Committee the power to pick who served on committees. Then, since Ways and Means was still powerful enough, they expanded its membership from 25 to 37, diluting the clout of its incumbent membership by adding reform-minded youngsters.

On December 10, 1974, Wilbur Mills retired. Promptly, House freshmen caucused and summoned all the other old committee chairs to audition, before what seventy-four-year-old Armed Services Committee chairman F. Edward Hébert of Louisiana called "a mob of crusading knights out to slay evil dragons." Hébert lied to their faces about his record approving nearly every request the Pentagon ever made. Then he said "we should have bombed the hell out of" North Vietnam.

One fresh feature of the 94th Congress was its six new women, bringing the total to eighteen, a record. One of them, thirty-five-year-old Pat Schroeder of Colorado, had seen her 1972 campaign as an antiwar housewife spied on by the FBI. At the meeting, she accused Hébert of having discriminated against her in the Armed Services Committee (he had once insisted she and the committee's black member, Ron Dellums, literally share a seat in the hearing room) because she was a woman. He responded that he would have treated her better if she had *acted* like a woman. The caucus fired him by a vote of 152–133. Afterward, to reporters waiting outside the hearing room, he called his inquisitors "boys and girls." He was not entirely wrong. One of them, freshman representative Tom Downey of New York, had attended his first peace march ten years earlier, at the age of fifteen.

Appropriations chair George Mahon (seventy-five years old) and the half-deaf chairman of the Agriculture Committee, W. R. Poage (seventy-six), who voted against the majority Democratic Party position more than he voted for it, were unhorsed for what a Common Cause report called "serious abuses" of procedural fairness and "arbitrary" treatment of colleagues. (Poage was replaced by the chairman of the Democratic Study Group.) Wright Patman lost his chairmanship of Currency and Banking, not for being a reactionary—he had been fighting concentrated power since the Progressive Era, and was the first congressman to undertake an investigation of Watergate—but solely for his age. "You can't have an 81-year-old chairman," even one who "was a hero to 90 percent of us," a young insurgent of the first Congress in history with an average age under fifty told the Associated Press. "Congress will never be the same," another new member told the press. "It's permanent. . . . I think the feeling is the sun is shining and now we really have a chance to do something."

One Old Bull, however, portentously survived. Wayne Hays of Ohio was known on Capitol Hill as the "meanest man in Congress." His Administration Committee enjoyed few powers outside the Capitol building but was a dictatorship within it. In charge of congressional staff allowances and benefits, he was known to cut them, and even to shut off members' air-conditioning, to settle personal scores—and to dock the pay of elevator operators and barbers who would not put up with his voluminous abuse. The *New York Times* called him "a disgrace to Ohio, the Democratic Party, and the House of Representatives." An Ohio paper pointed to his committee's one jurisdictional power of national import—federal election law—and claimed his work delaying implementation of the 1971 campaign finance law "made Watergate possible." But congressmen had a use for their very own sonofabitch: with his committee doling out perquisites like stationery allowances and government-paid trips home, they didn't have to vote for such appropriations themselves, on the House floor, on the public record. Such hustles seemed just the thing the Watergate Babies had in their sights. But after the Steering and Policy Committee voted 13–11 to strip his chairmanship, Hays began a furious overnight lobbying campaign promising to bestow on them more fringe benefits and a pay increase. Which his committee didn't have the jurisdiction to give—until, after the caucus voted to save him, they voted to newly give it to him.

"The clear inference," newspapers reported, "was that Congress expects Hays to give them a pay hike." Hays then confirmed the inference by telling reporters that "our take-home pay is like that of a peasant." (It was about four times America's median household income.) "The new idealists betrayed a small streak of venality," Howard Smith editorialized on ABC; the *Washington Post* said that "self-styled congressional reformers have tackled the establishment in order to establish themselves instead." Ralph Nader, whose Congress Watch had built much of the intellectual case for the House's decrepitude, cried sellout: "This is the type of political wheeling and dealing built on conflicts of interest that was widely rejected by voters in November. Surely the reform-minded members of the 94th Congress can do better than to perpetuate a man in office [in] response to the same old tradeoffs that have bred such cynicism about Congress in the public mind."

The Republican Party, it was true, seemed near to death. The *Washington Post*'s new conservative columnist George Will said visiting Republican National Committee headquarters was like visiting "the set for a political disaster flick, a political *Poseidon Adventure*." The bank holding the mortgage on the Capitol Hill Club, the private retreat where Republicans took their refreshment, was threatening to foreclose on the place. The party's pollster, Robert Teeter, explained that a majority of Americans considered Republicans "untrustworthy and incompetent." But here was a lesson Democrats would have all too much occasion to contemplate in the years ahead: to claim the mantle of purity is always a risky business. It just gives voters an excuse to be disillusioned once your ordinary humanity is exposed. How long did the new Congress's reputation for purity last? Two months, possibly. That was when a Maryland senator surveyed his constituents: "Do you have confidence in the ability of Congress to deal with today's problems?" They answered "no" by a margin of two to one. Commented a Baltimore couple: "We don't have enough confidence—or trust—in our congressmen to let them take out the garbage."

AMERICA STILL SEEMED ENTIRELY ROTTEN; NO WAVE OF BRIGHT-EYED reformers could change that. On Christmas morning a twenty-five-year-old model in Queens was beaten to death in her apartment, her neighbors ignoring the screams—in the same redbrick building where Kitty Genovese had lived. (Genovese had become a household name in 1964 after the *New York Times* reported that thirty-eight witnesses did nothing while she was knifed to death.) The new movie packing theaters was *The Godfather: Part II*. In a pivotal scene, a senator from Nevada wakes up from an alcoholic haze to see an unconscious prostitute—at which a consigliere assures the panicked politician that in exchange for his protecting the mobsters' criminality, no one need know that he murdered a hooker. In another, the heads of major American corporations sit around a table with mobsters, and President Batista of Cuba at the head; then a coven of mobsters conspires to divide Cuba as if divvying up a cake. "We're bigger than U.S. Steel," one says, and talks about putting a friendly president in the White House.

A banner headline in the December 22 edition of the *New York Times* read: "Huge C.I.A. Operation Reported in U.S. Against Antiwar Forces, Other Dissidents in Nixon Years." The article, by Seymour Hersh, reported that the spy agency had collected intelligence files on at least ten thousand American citizens in direct violation of its 1947 charter stipulating that it was allowed to work only outside the United States. The article also documented "dozens of other illegal activities by members of the C.I.A. in the United States, beginning in the nineteen-fifties, including break-ins, wiretapping, and the surreptitious inspection of mail." The jump took up nearly an entire inside page, with its tone of Orwellian menace suggested by the caption describing an image hovering above a photo of the CIA's Langley, Virginia, headquarters: "The agency's emblem symbolizes vigilance, directed to all points of the compass."

That long national nightmare that was supposed to be over: perhaps it was only beginning.

The *Times* ran thirty-two stories over the next two and a half weeks on a scandal that appeared to reach far deeper into "the system" than Watergate itself, reaching through the tenure of that supposed innocent, John F. Kennedy, all the way back to placid old Dwight D. Eisenhower. President Ford, caught unawares on the way to a ski vacation in Vail, Colorado, frantically backfilled to contain the damage. On January 5 he named a panel to be chaired by Vice President Rockefeller to investigate the allegations—like the panel in *The Parallax View*, you might say. One member, Douglas Dillon, a defense establishment überinsider and Rockefeller Foundation board member, had been privy himself to CIA secrets while serving under presidents Eisenhower, Kennedy, and Johnson. Another, General Lyman Lemnitzer, had as chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff deleted questions on the U-2 spy plane program for a 1962 House hearing. (According to one concerned congressman, it was "like the attempt of the totalitarian government described in George Orwell's book *1984* to rewrite history to suit the viewpoint of the government"; the congressman's name was Gerald Ford.) Another member, Lane Kirkland, was a top officer in the AFL-CIO, an organization so cooperative with hard-line Cold Warriors that its critics on the left dubbed it the "AFL-CIA." Rockefeller himself had been a member of Richard Nixon's Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board, the tiny top-secret civilian review panel that signed off on all covert activities. That meant that any genuine exposé of CIA abuses by this Rockefeller commission would . . . expose members of the Rockefeller commission. "Having the CIA investigated by such a group," the *Times* editorialized, "is like having the Mafia audited by its own accountants."

On January 19 came news of the publication in Britain of a shocking book-length exposé from an exiled former CIA agent, Philip Agee, called *Inside the Company: A CIA Diary*. That same day, the *Washington Post* confirmed rumors that J. Edgar Hoover had compiled files on the personal lives of congressmen—and, one week later, that the FBI had bugged Martin Luther King at the 1964 Democratic National Convention in Atlantic City, New Jersey. By February the new Congress planted its flag on the Sam Ervin model: both houses voted select committees to investigate both the FBI and the CIA—which, pace the injunction in Article I, Section 9 of the Constitution that "[n]o money shall be drawn from the Treasury, but in consequence of appropriations made by law; and a regular statement and account of the receipts and expenditures of all public money shall be published from time to time," had never had its budget reviewed by Congress, save for a tiny cadre of insiders who were given the tiniest little peek. One of them, John Stennis (Gerald Ford had been another), explained in 1971 how that system worked: "You make up your mind that you are going to have an intelligence agency and protect it as such, and shut your eyes some and take what is coming."

Not anymore. Between 1947 and 1974 some four hundred bills had been introduced to improve congressional oversight of intelligence agencies. All had come a cropper. But it took just two hours of debate for the Senate to pass this one, by a vote of 82–4; the world was different now. "In this year—so soon after Watergate—we cannot leave in doubt the operations and activities of agencies involved in such sensitive and secret endeavors," conservative Democrat Walter Huddleston of Kentucky said. Republicans were if anything harsher. Howard Baker, who had earlier tried and failed to charter an investigation on the CIA's role in Watergate, articulated a "shuddering fear" that the CIA was out of control. The Pennsylvania liberal Republican Richard Schweiker called it a "shadow government." Even Barry Goldwater, the security establishment's best friend, acceded to its investigation: "If surgery is required, let it be performed only after the most careful diagnosis." The suspicious circles, it seemed, were in the saddle.

THUS ARRIVED AN UNLIKELY DEVELOPMENT: CHASING SPOOKS BECAME A political opportunity. Frank Church, the liberal Democratic senator from Idaho, a longtime critic of the CIA ("I will do whatever I can, as one senator," he had said years earlier, "to bring about a full-scale congressional investigation of the CIA") and scourge of the Vietnam War ("a monstrous immorality")—and a presidential hopeful—maneuvered himself into the chairmanship of the new Senate Select Committee to Study Governmental Operations with Respect to Intelligence Activities. And for one of the members of the new Rockefeller commission, CBS reported, "the assignment could help keep presidential hopes alive."

That would be Governor Ronald Reagan, a surprise pick that had Washington insiders wondering if President Ford—approval rating: 42 percent—was more worried about a nomination challenge than anyone had previously thought. The *New York Times* did not approve. Reagan, it reported in a February article that read like an editorial, had "missed three of the four weekly meetings of the Presidential commission investigating the Central Intelligence Agency." He "reportedly told President Ford when he was asked to join the panel that his speaking engagements might conflict with the meetings." His secretary promised Reagan would "catch up by reading the transcripts of the missed sessions"—though, "according to the commission staff, Mr. Reagan has not yet visited the commission headquarters, where hundreds of pages of transcripts are kept in locked files." Instead, "During January, he gave seven 'major addresses' to such groups as the International Safari Club, in Los Vegas."

Who could take seriously a lightweight like that? Though CBS still spied a possible opening for a Reagan presidential bid: "If the economy overwhelms President Ford." Portents hinted at just that. In fact, that news was getting downright apocalyptic.

In December economists announced that the nation was officially in a recession. By January the projected annual growth rate was negative 5 percent. A Harris poll found only 11 percent of the country thought Ford was "keeping the economy healthy." Even the Godfather of Soul got into the act: "People! People! Got to get over, before we get under," growled James Brown in a new hit that was number four on the R&B charts: "There ain't no funky jobs to be found. Taxes going up . . . now I drink from a paper cup. Gettin' bad!"

On the heels of a Pentagon move to eliminate 11,600 civilian jobs at military bases, the auto industry announced 40,000 layoffs. Ford Motors cut production schedules at eleven of its twenty North American assembly plants and most of its forty-five manufacturing plants. Chrysler laid off almost 11,000 white-collar workers. American Motors idled 7,000 workers in one plant in Kenosha, Wisconsin, alone. In New Hampshire, a textile mill that had been in business since 1823 was scheduled to shutter. Maryland's largest private employer, the four-mile-long Sparrows Point steel complex, began laying off thousands; 100,000 steel workers lost their jobs nationwide between the previous summer and the upcoming fall; in December 1974—Christmastime—185,000 blue-collar workers found themselves without work. Businesses and consumers preferred products made elsewhere: foreign car sales were up 20 percent, American cars down almost 13. The *Economist* said, "Capitalism is being tested everywhere. Many people believe it is dying." It called the closing of 150 investment banks and securities dealers in the United States in recent weeks "some of the worst failures since the Great Depression." The National Association of Home Builders called the slump in its industry "far and away the worst since the Depression."

Since the Depression: a new household phrase.

It felt as if America did not even own itself. "Will Araby Bankrupt the World?" the January 25 *Saturday Review* cover asked. Rumor was that Saudis had bought up all the real estate in Beverly Hills. Arabs had bought us, yes, but they also hated us: in one page-turner selling out at airport book stores, *Black Sunday*, Palestinians had no trouble recruiting one of those sturdy patriotic heroes of 1973, a Vietnam prisoner of war, his brain too addled by torture to resist, to pilot an explosives-laden blimp into the Super Bowl; in another, *The Gargoyle Conspiracy*, Arabs assassinate the secretary of state. (*Time* noted jocularly that the Arab-bashing thrillers might someday no longer be published, if the Arabs bought all the publishing companies.) Meanwhile, the real-life secretary of state, in a Christmastime interview in *BusinessWeek*, hinted that a military strike to seize Middle East oil fields outright might be imminent. Then he left for a hat-in-hand tour of Arab capitals, as if making amends.

Gerald Ford, in his January 15 State of the Union address, was hardly more comforting: "I must say to you that the state of our Union is not good," he said. No president had ever told the citizenry anything like that.

But *Ronald Reagan* as the answer? His preferred solution to the crisis—turning management of the economy even more over to private interests—didn't sound right even to the conservative City of London gentlemen who edited the *Economist*. They opined that much of the blame for capitalism's tests lay with "a concentration of money into the hands of a few big banks, even more than these giants know what to do with."

In any event, with Ford tacking to the right, it was hard to see what room Reagan might have to maneuver. "FORD LAUDED BY WALL STREET ON INFLATION," read a headline about his speech to securities analysts who "generally applauded what they saw as President Ford's renewed determination to tackle inflation, rather than recession, as the nation's chief economic problem." He gave speeches in which he said things like "We face a critical choice. . . . Shall we slide headlong into an economy whose vital decisions are made by politicians while the private sector dries up and shrivels away?" The major economic idea in his State of the Union message was a tax rebate of around one hundred dollars for the average American, which was just the sort of thing a President Reagan would be likely to propose.

"President Reagan"—that inconceivable phrase. Ronald Reagan, who was still defending Richard Nixon, and who said two weeks before Gerald Ford's pardon that "the punishment of resignation is more than adequate for the crime."

Ronald Reagan, who told CBS "I hope to devote my time to hitting the sawdust trail and preaching the gospel of free enterprise"—"the gospel," like this was revealed truth or something.

This in a country where the most talked-about new bipartisan legislative proposal was soon to be Jacob Javits and Hubert Humphrey's "Balanced Growth and Economic Planning Act," which attempted to grow the country out of stagflation by setting up an Office of National Economic Planning to govern such heretofore unregulated parts of the economy as factory production, and which would submit six-year plans to Congress every twenty-four months. This might once have sounded like something out of the Soviet Union. But now—why not? One of Ford's aides, who would go on to become vice chairman of Goldman Sachs, thought Ford should co-opt the idea as his own, as "a highly constructive presidential initiative." Intellectuals devoured the arguments of sociologist Daniel Bell, in *The Coming of Post-Industrial Society: A Venture in Social Forecasting*, "that, today, we in America are moving away from a society based on a private-enterprise market system toward one in which the most important economic decisions will be made at the political level, in terms of consciously defined 'goals' and priorities.' . . . A turn to non-capitalist modes of social thought . . . is the long-run historical tendency in Western society."

Indeed the general public agreed. Free enterprise as "gospel"? When Gallup asked voters whether wage and price controls should be put back into effect—the most proximate example of the kind of thing Bell was talking about—66 percent said yes. When they asked how to deal with inflation, only 12 percent gave Reagan's answer: cut government spending. Only 6 percent of the public said that when unions asked for too much money it caused higher prices—Reagan's other favorite economic claim.

Columnist Colman McCarthy's year-in-review piece in the *Washington Post* announced, "We live in a time of collapse with expressions of hope . . . no brighter than Albert Camus' belief: 'The important thing is not to be cured but to live with one's ailments.'"

It wasn't the 1920s anymore. *Ronald Reagan?*

As it happened, there was a new biography out of Reagan's favorite author of boys' books, Horatio Alger. It advertised on its back cover its central Woodward-and-Bernstein-like investigatory find, an 1866 letter from the members of Alger's Unitarian congregation: "Horatio Alger. Jr., who has officiated as our minister for about 15 months past has recently been charged with gross immorality and a most heinous crime, a crime of no less magnitude than the abominable and revolting crime of unnatural familiarity with boys. . . ."

These were suspicious times. Heroes were what you were supposed to throw from pedestals. And yet here was gee-whiz, aw-shucks Ronald Reagan, acting like nothing had changed. Who when CBS inquired about his presidential ambitions demurred, like a Boy Scout, as always: "Anyone who is approached by his fellow citizens and is called to duty would have to give it serious consideration." But his fellow Republicans weren't interested; according to Gallup, 16 percent wanted him as their nominee—the same number as wanted to go back to Barry Goldwater.

Ronald Reagan. Who, now that he had ceded the governor's chair to Jerry Brown, was launching a new enterprise: a daily five-minute radio homily that his representatives claimed would soon be running on more than three hundred stations around the country.

LATE IN REAGAN'S SECOND TERM IN SACRAMENTO, AFTER HE ANNOUNCED he wouldn't run for a third, two top gubernatorial aides with backgrounds in public relations, Peter Hannaford (introspective, bespectacled, brainy) and Michael Deaver (intense, practical, a tough negotiator), created a firm that made launching Ronald Reagan's postgubernatorial career 60 percent of its business. What next, when he left Sacramento in January 1975? They entertained, then discarded, the notion of some sort of academic position at Pepperdine, the conservative Disciples of Christ university outside Malibu; likewise a job "as nominal head of a national organization, particularly one already known" (a conservative one like the U.S. Chamber of Commerce or the Freedoms Foundation, perhaps "even groups such as the Red Cross"), which might "provide 'instant' access and legitimacy for his opinions on a variety of topics." Maybe PBS specials documenting his visits to college campuses; or an offer, conceptualized by a magnate in the dehydrated onion and garlic industry named J. H. Hume, to be funded by the right-wing oil heir Richard Mellon Scaife, to take up a "Distinguished Public Affairs Fellowship" from the Hoover Institution at Stanford, with the aim of crafting an "opus magnus [*sic*] in the form of a book of essays on solutions to national and international problems."

That idea, too, went nowhere. A proposed condition of the Hoover fellowship was the hope that "he would restrict his speaking engagements and traveling insofar as possible to allow time for his own studies," which apparently did not entice. Another part of the offer that may have not have appealed to them was the stipend for the proposed half-time job: $25,000. One major goal for Deaver & Hannaford was to establish the governor as a viable presidential contender. Another was to make him a rich man. Memos larded with estimates of income and expenses flew around: speaking engagements estimated at an average fee of $5,000 per (soon he would be spending twelve to fourteen days a month on the road); freelance pieces under the governor's byline ("In addition to exploring interview opportunities [e.g. PLAYBOY] we should target for sales of six RR articles to major magazines at an average sale of $1,000"); talks with superagent Irving "Swifty" Lazar about a book deal with Knopf—for a "total estimated income" anticipated in one planning document at "Net: $134,440 . . . plus income from consulting, board memberships, personal investments, State retirement fund" (his actual earnings in 1975 were reportedly close to $800,000).

Like any corporate enterprise, the project had to be capitalized, and like any ambitious political enterprise—it was both—it needed to establish a reliable list of potential future supporters. Plans were laid for a direct mail campaign, the one stone to kill two birds: "To keep the nation following the conservative mandate of 1972 and to warn of the alternative—a neo-Socialist planned economy—we must speak out across America," ran the proposed pitch over Reagan's printed signature, to go out to the conservative mailing lists. "This takes time and money. I'm willing to invest the time, but I'm not a Rockefeller or a Kennedy, and I need your help to pay the costs."

A column was syndicated, with Hannaford, Pat Buchanan, and a young aide named Jeff Bell as ghostwriters, to be called "Viewpoint"; there was a full schedule of speeches, including, in April, one before the Pilgrim Society in London. ("RONALD REAGAN: A Program for the Future," a Deaver & Hannaford strategy memo dated November 4, 1974, noted at heading "I. Political Goals," subparagraph C: "Enhance foreign affairs credibility"). Possibly a syndicated radio program—though surely a more fertile field was television, for which a glamorous and lucrative proposal was on the table: a twice-weekly commentary spot on Walter Cronkite's marquee newscast.

Michael Deaver salivated at that one. Not the governor. As was frequently the case with his executive style, he was indifferent to details of his PR men's execution, showing up at the Deaver & Hannaford office only a couple of days a week—but he could be forcefully specific on things that mattered to him. Like that office's location: fifteen minutes from his Pacific Palisades home, he insisted, and fifteen minutes from the airport. And like the idea of a regular TV spot. "People will tire of me on television," he said. "They won't tire of me on the radio."

That Reagan constant: aware, always, of the gaze of others; reflecting on it, adjusting himself to it, inviting it; modeling himself, in his mind's eye, according to how he presented himself to others; adjusting himself to be perceived as he wished others to perceive him. Radio it would be. The first two stations to pick him up in syndication were WOC in Davenport and WHO in Des Moines—the stations, forty-two years earlier, where he had made his broadcasting debut.

> *"If you're under the impression that federal food stamps are only available to the elderly and the poor, you're in for a surprise. I'll be right back."*

> *"Why is the Consumer Protection Agency bill like a basket of kittens? It's more than a riddle. It's a fact of life. I'll be right back."*

> *"If you're charged with breaking the law, you're innocent until proven guilty. If you're charged with breaking some bureaucrat's regulation, it's the other way around. I'll be right back."*

> *"If you're not familiar with the term 'boondoggle,' consider the fact that our federal government recently underwrote the cost of a study dealing with Polish bisexual frogs. If that doesn't give you a hint, stand by. I'll be right back."*

Thus opened his first week’s broadcasting efforts. After a commercial break, Reagan would satisfy the curiosity he’d stirred two minutes before with a simple, folksy story about a fundamentally sound, decent citizenry set upon by a government gone mad.

> *If you’ve had the experience of standing in the checkout line in the supermarket next to a strapping young fella with a big basket of groceries who pays for them in food stamps, and you’re worrying how long you’ll be able to find the cash to feed your family, and you’ve paid your taxes, you’ve probably worried about the food stamp program and how it works.*

Not well, he went on to explain, telling the story of a father who made one hundred thousand dollars a year but whose college student son got food stamps in California, and another about a young woman in California who “took just enough college courses to avoid the food stamp work requirement who was studying to be a witch.”

> *When you were young did you ever have the experience of trying to carry a basket of kittens? One would pop its head up and try to crawl up over the side of the basket and while you were trying to push him back down another would pop up on the other side of the basket, and it seemed there were more heads than you had hands?*

That was what you needed to know about the Consumer Protection Agency bill, an innocuous-sounding law (despised, Reagan didn’t say, by business lobbyists) that would create “a big new federal government bureaucracy that would have the power to supersede all other government agencies plus the power to take records and trade secrets from businesses and industries and make them public,” which was “as big a threat to our free economy as anything that’s been proposed.” When senators filibustered, then defeated cloture three times, “in an unprecedented break with tradition they tried a fourth time and failed. But don’t start a celebration. Like that basket of kittens, this one will pop again soon, maybe with a new title or maybe even as an amendment to some necessary piece of legislation that everyone supports.”

It all went by fast, in a time before the casually suspicious could whip out laptop computers and google whether what he said was actually true—as, very often, it was not. Take the case of the Polish bisexual frogs: more than a year earlier, after an Idaho congressman introduced the “scandal” on the House floor, a columnist for an obscure little newspaper in Boca Raton, Florida, learned the research in question was of potential promise for understanding of how hybrids might improve the efficiency of agriculture—and had not been funded by American taxpayers at all.

It was hard to see what such tidy fabulism could accomplish politically. In his second week on the air, for instance, Reagan claimed that worries about high unemployment amounted to “a case of mass hysteria,” an “artificially induced depression psychology,” and were all the fault of how the Bureau of Labor Statistics incorporated into the unemployment numbers bored housewives looking for part-time work in households “where poppa’s holding down a steady job,” and fourteen-year-olds who wanted paper routes. But if the BLS started counting properly, he boldly proclaimed, the unemployment rate would be only 1 percent.

Two hundred thousand people had just been laid off in the automobile industry. Who was Ronald Reagan going to convince?

Sixty-six percent of the public surveyed had recently told Gallup they did not want to reduce spending for “social programs such as health, education, and welfare programs.” RNC focus group research concluded, “The first thing that comes to people’s mind about the Republican Party is that it’s the party of big business.”

And yet here was Ronald Reagan, blithely acting as if a mass electorate, incensed that “trade secrets from businesses and industries” would be made public, might rise as one against consumer protection and somehow turn the Republican Party into a fighting force in a nation that had just voted two to one for Democrats.

But then his, after all, was the zeal of the convert. He had left Iowa in 1937 a “hemophiliac, bleeding heart liberal.” Then Hollywood, and a long, slow conversion. Let us pause to consider how it happened, and what that transformation might have meant for the future of the nation.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

Star

IN 1935 RONALD REAGAN PREVAILED UPON HIS RADIO EMPLOYERS TO PAY his travel expenses to a sumptuous resort off the coast of Orange County, California, Catalina Island, where the Chicago Cubs trained each February: the perfect opportunity, he convinced the boss, to store up a season's worth of color to fill in between the Cubs' telegraphed plays. In 1937, he made the trip for a third time, this time with an ulterior motive. Joy Hodges, a house vocalist at the station, had won a contract at RKO Studios; Hugh Hipple, a colleague from his previous station in Davenport, signed with Universal (Hollywood rechristened him as "Hugh Marlowe"); then WHO's country band, the Oklahoma Outlaws, was signed to appear in a Gene Autry singing cowboy picture.

Joy Hodges had showed up in Des Moines for a personal appearance and sat down with Dutch for an interview.

He asked, "Well, Miss Hodges, how does it feel to be a movie star?"

He was wearing his riding breeches. She thought he looked very handsome. Though he couldn't be quite sure how *she* looked. He never wore his glasses when he wished to impress.

She answered, "Well, Mr. Reagan, you may know one day."

That February, before checking in with the Cubs at Catalina, he checked into a hotel at Hollywood and Vine. His first stop was Republic Pictures, where the Oklahoma Outlaws were filming their cowboy picture. The Western mythos had always fascinated him: Monmouth, Illinois, where his family moved when he was six, boosted itself as the hometown of Sheriff Wyatt Earp; in Dixon a beloved teacher regaled her class with tales of her adventures as a waitress at the Harvey House restaurants at railway depots in remote frontier outposts; at the movie house he whiled away hours in awe at "the marvelous flickering antics of Tom Mix and William S. Hart as they foiled robbers and villains and escorted beautiful girls to safety, waving back from their horses"—his kind of guys. Republic, however, was not his kind of studio. The white linen suit he had carefully picked out for the trip wilted in the heat, a casting director handed him a stack of old scripts—cut-rate formula Westerns, Saturday serials, B pictures shown at the bottom half of double bills—and invited him to pick a scene for an audition the following week. His aspirations were higher than that. He never returned.

He retreated to Catalina, a more suitable setting for dreams: yachts, beach houses, a cocktail bar thirty yards long, a Moorish casino, an entire abandoned South Sea movie set left over from a Gloria Swanson picture. The Cubs' manager complained Reagan wasn't showing up to watch practice. Instead he spent his days daydreaming. He had already cast himself in his life's next role.

Joy Hodges was performing at the Biltmore Bowl, the ballroom where the Oscar ceremonies were held. He ambushed her backstage after the show, begging for a studio tour. She agreed—at which point he upped the stakes: an entry for a screen test. She agreed, introducing him to her agent, George Ward of the Meiklejohn Agency. Ward found Reagan just the type he preferred to sell: "likable, clean-cut all-American," with "good looks that appealed mostly to young girls and old women." And he knew just whom to approach. An up-and-coming contract player at Warner Bros. with just such all-American good looks, Ross Alexander, had just shot himself. Hollywood studios being factories, with Warners the most factory-like of them all, nothing could be allowed to slow down the assembly line; Warners would need someone to slot into Ross Alexander's roles. That was how George Ward got his prospect a screen test. However, Ronald Reagan would never tell the story this way himself. In his version, it happened just like a movie—and in 1937, movies did not feature handsome young studs shooting themselves in the head.

His version read like this:

"Look, Joy told me that you would level with me. Should I go back to Des Moines and forget this, or what do I do?"

(The melodramatic turning point, when all hung in suspense.)

"He didn't answer. He just picked up the phone, dialed a number which turned out to be Warners Brothers studio . . . and said, 'Max, I have another Taylor sitting in my office.'"

(From the other end of the line: "God made only one Robert Taylor!"—comic relief.)

Cue happy ending. He's led to the Warner Bros. lot, he aces the audition, and returns to Des Moines, where a telegram arrives:

WARNERS OFFERS CONTRACT SEVEN YEARS, ONE YEAR'S OPTION, STARTING AT $200 A WEEK. WHAT SHALL I DO?

He answered:

SIGN BEFORE THEY CHANGE THER MINDS. DUTCH REAGAN.

How could it have happened any other way?

SO IT WAS THAT ON JUNE 1, 1937, RONALD WILSON REAGAN WAS DELIVered unto the doorstep of an American company town, its practices as routinized as those of General Motors' Detroit, Kodak's Rochester, or Goodyear's Akron. Its product was not even motion pictures, really. It manufactured something called "stars." For when the Jewish immigrant tycoons who had run nickelodeons in New York invented a mass entertainment industry of a scope never before seen in the world, one of the first things they discovered was that the most efficient way to lure customers into an unfamiliar story was to put a familiar face on the poster. People like Florence Lawrence, the "Biograph Girl." Or Rudolph Valentino. Or, when sound came in, a fast talker like James Cagney. Such figures weren't merely actors: they were fully integrated personae. Their ineffable essence—their "type"—lingered from one picture to the next. Their skill as much as or more than their acting was in their ability to project that type to the public offscreen as well: at Hollywood bistros, in autograph sessions, in "candid" at-home shots in the fan magazines that women devoured by the millions, at the beauty parlors, beside the ironing board, between infant feedings, awash in reverie—an emotional cathexis the studio wizards worked so desperately to produce. Souls simultaneously larger than life and yet somehow familiar.

Could "stars" be unearthed like precious gems? Could they be made? No one ever figured that one out. And so the first step, "discovery," was a volume business, one that operated, as a book on the process by the film historian Jeanine Basinger, *The Star Machine*, described it, "on the principle that if it dropped a lot of nubile young blondes into its star-making machine, at least one of them might come out looking like a heartbreaker." Scouts fanned out everywhere, to vaudeville theaters, nightclub acts, Miss Blossom of 1937 pageants—and radio stations. If anything was remarkable about this chapter in Ronald Reagan's story, it was that it took so long to get started.

Then came that screen test, which was divided in three parts: first, acting a scene; second, trying on wardrobe; and finally, the test that Basinger describes as "all-important"—the personality test. In it, the "newcomer was photographed while off-screen 'testers' asked questions designed to relax the performer and reveal the natural personality." Then and only then might a provisional contract be conferred, and the real work begin: a "looking over" period in which the "talent" was weighed, measured, and prodded; studied under a literal magnifying glass (for skin blemishes . . .); glimpsed at every angle and under every condition of natural and studio light; and more—with "no parallel outside a tenth-century Arab slave-trading market."

The body thus revealed was then suitably transformed: platform shoes for the too-short; girdles for the too-fat; a hair color that showed up just right on black-and-white stock; plastic surgery. (The hairline of a prospect named Margarita Carmen Cansino sat too low, implying the fact that her father was Spanish; electrolysis took care of that, and turned her into "Rita Hayworth.") The "natural personality," as revealed in the personality test, was but raw material. James Stewart's, for example: in real life he attended a tony prep school, then Princeton, before MGM turned him into a scourge of the Ivy League swells.

Aspiring stars could be trained in just about everything: how to talk, how to walk (MGM starlets were recognizable for their "Metro walk": stomach tucked in, shoulders squared, right foot first), how to be interviewed. How to ride a horse, how to dance. How to be photographed, by both motion picture and still cameras. The latter were just as important—for instance, for those all-important movie fan magazine spreads, where the actor might be depicted in pursuit of some hobby invented out of whole cloth. Mickey Rooney allegedly raised his own chickens. He was featured in *Modern Screen* in 1940 gathering eggs. "I'd read stories about Alice Faye in the papers," one star, née Alice Leppert, recollected, "and I would wonder who that girl was."

Ronald Reagan arrived ahead of the game. He already came packaged inside a persona—one he'd been building himself since he was a boy.

He had chosen his movie star name (though the brass rejected it as too over-the-top, so his pals back in Iowa were shocked to see "Ronald" on marquees; they'd only ever known him as Dutch). He had fashioned his sumptuous voice ("Dear Mr. Reagan: You have the most wonderful voice in pictures," read one early fan letter), and had been studying himself being studied by the camera since he was a little boy. As in that group shot of the Dixon YMCA boys band where his elbow was cocked just so, his cape flared instead of lying just flat, and he handled his drum major scepter like a king.

Which was why the studio was able to shoot him off like a rocket, practically from the day he arrived.

Most first deals included a reassessment period after six months; Reagan landed a seven-year deal right away. The standard formula was to test newcomers in a series of walk-on roles before any real investment began. But eleven days after his arrival in Hollywood, the *Chicago Tribune* headlined its regular Hollywood dispatch "SPORTS WRITER IS FEATURED IN FIRST MOVIE." In the dispatch, the "athletic looking, brown haired . . . former lifeguard" named his favorite role from Eureka College theatricals: Captain Stanhope in *Journey's End*—"same role at Pomona College which called Bob Taylor to the attention of movie scouts," Dutch, who'd clearly been paying attention to such things, later noted to an interviewer. He'd been preparing for this all his life.

That first movie, a B picture of about an hour's length, was *Love Is on the Air*. In the trailer, he introduced himself to the nation with an aw-shucks just-so story, leaning jauntily against the camera in a tweed three-piece suit, holding a fedora:

"My name is Ronald Reagan. A few months ago I was a sports announcer on a radio station in Des Moines, Iowa. One day I ran into one of these movie talent scouts. I think I caught him off guard because the next thing I knew I was taking a screen test for Warner Brothers in Hollywood!"

(He cocked his head to the side earnestly, puppyish.)

"I guess it was OK. At least I liked Hollywood! So here I am."

He played a local radio announcer who in the nick of time and with the pretty girl at his side tricked the racketeers and leading citizens conspiring to defraud the town into exposing themselves before an open microphone. Then came the nifty fight sequence, which *Variety*'s reviewer singled out for praise. The *Prescott* (Arizona) *Evening Courier*'s review paraphrased the press release—and since Warners put out a fantastic press release ("a big, good-looking athletic lad named Ronald Reagan . . . going places in pictures"), it was a splendid review. Warners had him going places. The first fan magazine shoot came soon after: "New Answer to Maidens' Prayers" was illustrated with Dutch in a bathing costume, leaping out of a chair, eyes set stalwartly at the horizon, telling the same story ("Ronald 'Dutch' Reagan chalked up a record for himself of having saved seventy-seven lives in seven summers. But he declines to say how many of them were females") he'd managed to get told about him since his first appearance in the *Dixon Telegraph* in 1928.

He could only dream things would have jumped off this well.

Then, things promptly flatlined.

IN THE COMPLEX MULTIVARIATE ANALYSES OF THE STUDIO WIZARDS about which of the players they were throwing up against the wall were sticking, reviews played an outsize role: with so many pictures, some with a dozen or more billed actors, whether any given actor got mentioned was grounds for promotion. It wasn't happening for Reagan. When he was several spots down the bill from Humphrey Bogart in a cornpone comedy about pro wrestlers, *Swing Your Lady*, the *Chicago Tribune* didn't notice him; neither did the *Los Angeles Times* and the *New York Times* when he played in the goofy satire *Cowboy from Brooklyn*. In 1938 he got eight credits, each less memorable than the last. ("Doesn't add up to a masterpiece," *Variety* said of *Naughty but Nice*. "But it won't chase them out of the theaters.") The trailer for a particularly silly sequel in the "Tugboat Annie" series mispronounced his name. That happened again and again. Sometimes it was misspelled—"REGAN."

Maybe he had just chosen the wrong studio. Each had a personality, the lengthened shadow of a dictatorial czar—and at cheap Jack Warner's shop, famously averse to raising up too many swelled-headed stars, the signature product was the dark, brooding "social problems" picture, a genre uncongenial to the genial Dutch. "This fellow Reagan is a hard one to peg," a 1940 fan mag feature observed. "He's been in Hollywood for three years, so you'd think people would begin to have a fairly definite idea of what he's like. But all you're sure about is that everybody is fond of him." Not enough, apparently, for star billing.

Of course, a particularly charismatic player could single-handedly invent a type, often accidentally: Humphrey Bogart, as the hard-bitten, forlorn loner who opts for softhearted sacrifice in the last reel; Errol Flynn, the devil-may-care swashbuckler who made it all look so easy. Reagan did not reveal that sort of genius. When Warners finally did find a niche for him it was in the notoriously cheap "B unit" run by producer Bryan Foy. In his first picture as Secret Service Agent Brass Bancroft, *Variety* liked the "scrap scenes, one aboard a plane"; of the second, it opined, "Will be limited to bookings in lower half of duals as filler footage"; the third was so bad Reagan begged his bosses to keep it on the shelf. Now he had his type—and a humiliating nickname: the "Errol Flynn of the B's." It was as if he'd never left the Republic Pictures lot at all. As for Foy, the reason he said he liked working with Reagan was that "he showed up for work in the morning sober."

Sometimes he floated up to a "prestige" picture, as the star's amiable foil—almost as if his worth rested in his ability *not* to convey depth of emotion. (Nearly three decades later, when Jack Warner heard his former charge was running for governor, he protested: "No, no, Jimmy Stewart for governor; Ronald Reagan for best friend.") In a 1939 hit, he played pal to a dying Bette Davis; within Hollywood's unspoken codes, the nonromantic complement to the leading lady was, generally speaking, a homosexual—and there was Dutch, in *Dark Victory*, gallivanting around in a tuxedo, always on call with a cocktail shaker when she needed a shoulder to cry on at 5:30 A.M. At one point in the shoot he begged the director for a story change that would mark him as a romantic rival. The director shot back, "'Do you think you are playing the leading man?'"

His self-worth had always come from being a star. He had brought an admiring crowd of Drake frat boys with him to Hollywood. His little brother, his parents—with whom, for a time, he lived—came, too. They were supposed to be witnessing his triumph. Instead they watched him become a face in the crowd.

And then, light broke through the clouds.

After an ill-fated engagement to marry his costar in *Secret Service of the Air*, Ila Rhodes (he never talked about it, and decades later was dismayed when an enterprising interviewer dug up her name), he married a button-nosed starlet named Jane Wyman, who played ditzy blond chorus girls in pictures like *Gold Diggers of 1937* and *George White's 1935 Scandals*. One of the gifts of his marriage, then of the birth of his first daughter, Maureen, in 1941, was the emergence of a marketable offscreen persona: now he was patriarch of a "perfect" young family. It was a role within which he could not have felt more comfortable. It made sense: his marriage had almost been produced like something out of the Bryan Foy unit. Their flirtation had begun on a nationwide vaudeville-style tour sponsored by a Hollywood power broker, columnist Louella Parsons, a fellow native of Dixon; they announced their engagement from her stage, then her column announced the romance to the world. The wedding reception took place in "Lolly's" home, and she henceforth featured the "great personality . . . being rapidly groomed by Warners for stardom" on a regular basis. (Perhaps it was Parsons who advised him that his original fiancée was miscast. "EXOTIC STAR IS PART INDIAN," ran one early feature on Ila Rhodes; "BLOND INDIAN PITCHES TEPEE AT STUDIO," headlined another—no fit partner for a clean-cut all-American.)

He found increasing representation in gossip columns and fan magazines.

> *RONALD REAGAN and Jane Wyman have often been called "Hollywood's nicest young couple." They have successfully managed to combine two active careers with maintaining a happy home and being parents. Jane attributes a great deal of their success to the fact that Ronald makes the decisions in the family. Another factor is that Ronnie has the disposition of an angel, according to Jane, who should know. They've never had a quarrel. And he never forgets an anniversary or a birthday. What a guy!*

He would henceforth be featured far out of proportion to his box-office success—one of only three male stars to appear on the cover of *Photoplay* more than once. Then he got his breakthrough picture, one that blurred actor and role in just the way studio publicists liked best. In the storybook world of Grantland Rice, the only hero who loomed larger than Babe Ruth was Knute Rockne, the legendary Notre Dame football coach. Studebaker named a car after him. When he died in a plane crash in 1931 the king of Norway knighted him posthumously. Ten thousand were in attendance at Dearborn Station when his funeral train arrived in Chicago. And—to pick a certain Midwestern newspaper as an example—the *Dixon Evening Telegraph* ran nine stories about his passing over four days, upstaging news of one of the most catastrophic earthquakes in the history of the world. "KNUTE, SPINDLY BOY IN CHICAGO, SAW IN 'ECKIE,' HIGH SCHOOL QUARTERBACK, HIS IDEAL": the real world was trading places with legend, in just the way Reagan adored.

He wasn't long at Warners before he suggested they make a Rockne picture. Unsurprisingly, the studio ignored him. Also unsurprisingly, when a Rockne biopic was finally put on the schedule, with Pat O'Brien as star, it ignored him again, testing ten other young blades for George Gipp, the role Dutch burned to play. He got that audition only upon the intervention of a man whose appearance in his life marked another turning point in his fortunes: Lew Wasserman. In 1940, his agent's firm was acquired by the entertainment conglomerate MCA, whose chief executive, Wasserman, would soon become the closest thing Hollywood ever had to a king. He had already taken a shine to young Reagan—they'd socialized together, frequently in the company of Sidney Korshak, the colorful attorney of Chicago's organized crime syndicate. Wasserman decided to take Reagan on personally as his client. Their first coup was the Gipp audition—which Reagan won after telling the producer he had studied the story in Rockne's diaries so closely he practically wouldn't have to learn lines.

Knute Rockne never published a diary.

He did, however, publish a book. *Coaching: The Way of a Winner* argued that "the history or traditions of the school are a great thing to recite to your team, and to keep before them. Exaggerate these as much as you can.” Such cynicism was not displayed in *Knute Rockne, All-American*—even as its plot turned on one of Rockne's most cynical acts, which became in the telling his most pure.

In real life George Gipp had been an inveterate gambler who cared for neither discipline nor corny school spirit, and who died a fortuitously storybook death. As he sat on the bench with a cold during a losing game against Northwestern, the crowd clamored for Gipp to be put in; the ailing hero single-handedly won the game with two glorious touchdowns, then died from pneumonia. And, eight years later, it is verifiably true, a player did cry something like “That's one for the Gipper” while scoring a game-winning touchdown against Army.

According to a story Grantland Rice told that was not verifiably true, this was because at halftime Knute Rockne tearfully regaled the team with the story of how George Gipp on his deathbed had begged him to stir them to victory by invoking his martyrdom—just the kind of story the cynical Rockne thought it was the coach's prerogative to invent. It was like the time in 1922 when he read his faltering team a “telegram” from his sick child Billy, who actually was in the pink of health. Or one of the five times he pretended he was about to quit, when he had no intention of quitting at all.

For Hollywood such details need not matter. Nor did they matter to Ronald Reagan, who had been telling such stories—*“To every man comes Gethsemane!”*—about how the world worked his entire life. He played the climactic scene of Gipp's spiritual rebirth from selfish playboy to stout-hearted man to within an inch of his life: *“Rock, sometime when the team is up against it and the breaks are beating the boys, tell them to go out there with all they've got and win just one for the Gipper. I don't know where I'll be then, Rock, but I'll know about it and I'll be happy.”* When he lived again in its last reel, his ghost inspiring a bedraggled team to victory, teary-eyed audiences left the theaters with a new star in mind—Ronald Reagan.

He brought his parents to the gala debut in South Bend, Indiana, the thrill of his Catholic father's life. Jack, many years on the wagon, enjoyed one last spree with his fellow Irish Catholic rogue, Pat O'Brien, and died shortly after. (Dutch told the story of Jack's funeral to his daughter Maureen: “My soul was just desolate, that's the only word I can use . . . all of a sudden I heard somebody talking to me, and I knew that it was Jack, and he was saying, ‘I'm OK, and where I am it's very nice. Please don't be unhappy.’ And I turned to my mother . . . and I said, ‘Jack is OK, and where he is he's very happy’ . . . the desolation wasn't there any more, the emptiness was all gone.” Everything always works out in the end, gloriously.)

His next picture, *Santa Fe Trail*, was an honest-to-goodness Western. For his next he was “loaned out” to MGM—the sign of a suddenly hot property. Hollywood's preeminent columnist brought Reagan and Wyman along for “Louella Parsons Day” in Dixon, and he was received as a fellow superstar alongside Bob Hope and Ann Rutherford by a parade crowd estimated at fifty thousand. There he promoted *International Squadron*—his first leading role in a prestige picture (he “carries the starring burden,” the *New York Times* said, “and proves he can carry it”). In August 1941 he came in fifth in the “rising star” section of the *Motion Picture Herald*'s annual poll of 13,900 exhibitors. And when Warners needed a young player for a key role in a major melodrama, *King's Row*, Reagan was one of the only actors it considered—as a young playboy victimized by a cruel physician who maliciously amputated his legs, who matures from the hardship into a hero. Reagan was so pleased with his performance he started screening the picture at his dinner parties.

By playing the character of the young blade traveling the journey from diffidence to stout-hearted manhood, in *Knute Rockne*, in *King's Row*, at last Ronald Reagan had a “type.” By the unwritten rules of Hollywood, that meant he could now be a star. Warners tripled his salary (it was Lew Wasserman's first million-dollar deal). *King's Row* was nominated for a best picture Oscar. On December 3, 1941, Warners announced that Ronald Reagan got more fan mail that year than James Cagney, and that only Errol Flynn had received more. The world was his oyster. Life was again just one grand sweet song.

Then came December 7, 1941: a day that would live in infamy, and a day when his life began falling apart.

Other stars went overseas after Pearl Harbor and came back heroes—after enlisting as a private, James Stewart flew twenty dangerous missions in a B-17 Flying Fortress, and rose to colonel. Reagan's poor vision meant he couldn't see combat. Lew Wasserman was determined he stay home entirely. Wasserman himself, though twice classified as 1A, had managed to defer his own service for the duration. Doing the same for investments like Reagan was a specialty of both MCA and Warner Bros.

The first deferment came before Pearl Harbor, with the birth of Maureen. Then Warners, advised by Wasserman to make the case to the Pentagon that Reagan's absence would “represent serious financial loss to the studio," asked for him to be placed in the reserve pool. When that request was denied, Warners deployed a secret weapon: the studio's crooked military liaison, who kept a stack of pilfered blank U.S. Army commissions to steer Warners favorites into the safe assignments the studio preferred. Jack Warner himself had been instrumental in inventing one such assignment: the Army Air Corps' "First Motion Picture Unit," set up to produce training pictures and headquartered at a mothballed studio in Culver City where Hal Roach had once made the *Our Gang* shorts. This was where Reagan ended up. Though he himself told the story of his deployment a little differently. "I've just been told, here at the studio, of two very important parts that were to be mine," ran an article under his byline in *Photoplay*. "But I won't be doing these pictures. Uncle Sam has called me, a Reserve officer in the Cavalry, and I'm off to the war."

"Fort Roach," "Fort Wacky," and the "Culver City Commandos" were the nicknames Hollywood wags coined for the faintly ridiculous outfit, whose base commander was a stunt pilot who described their job as "putting a square peg in a square hole." Reagan alone took to the posting with utmost seriousness: the military breeches, the shiny leather boots, the jeeps, the "troops" he got to lead in formation like the toy soldiers he so adored in 1919. However, these soldiers talked back. "Knock it off with the marching around!" one of the hacks serving under him—producers, directors, and the like, many of them, unlike him, not fighting because they were simply too old—demanded. He was just a contract player who'd barely broken into the prestige ranks; these guys might later be his bosses. He had no choice but to comply.

He turned his attention to diversions like memorizing each issue of *Reader's Digest*, which he somehow managed to obtain before anyone else ("When we finally got our own copies," the writer Irving Wallace complained, "we'd already heard the whole damn issue from Reagan"); playing basketball on the base recreation league team; devouring a book by a mystic named Manly P. Hall, *The Secret Destiny of America*, whose rhetoric about Providence's great plan for the land between the oceans would recur often in Reagan's speeches in decades to come; and, as the post's director of administration, sending out disciplinary notes about the overflowing ashtrays in the script clerk's and assistant manager's offices. He didn't even get to shine in the training films: in *Jap Zero*, he played the schlemiel who accidentally shot at one of his own planes; in *The Rear Gunner*, in which he had only five lines, he played the officer who talked the hero into taking the job. He did star in one picture at Fort Roach: in an in-house gag as a general briefing a squadron before a vital mission, stabbing the wall map, barking "This is our target!"—at which the map rolled up like a window blind to reveal a naked girl.

Late in 1942 the Allies invaded North Africa and a movie was rushed into theaters. The *New York Times* called it "a picture which makes the spine tingle and the heart to take a leap." *Variety* called it a genuine contribution to the war effort. Made by the same producer as *Knute Rockne, All American*, it was the seventh-highest-grossing film of 1943; in March 1944 it won three Academy Awards. And, the *Hollywood Reporter* had reported a month after the war began, Ronald Reagan was supposed to play *Casablanca's* lead instead of Humphrey Bogart. So close, and yet so far.

He looked dashing in his captain's uniform on the October 1944 cover of *Modern Screen;* meanwhile, the humiliations compounded. The star system was in churning transformation, as studios replaced actors sent to war with a different brand of leading man: younger, leaner, brooding—sensitive types, to match the tastes of young men and women thrown into serious adult responsibilities at younger and younger ages. Reagan overheard their names from the mouths of the swooning secretaries in Fort Roach's stenography pool—names like Van Johnson. Johnson had a plate in his head that saved his life after a car crash and rendered him ineligible for military service. He had been released from his contract at Warner Bros. just as the studio was tripling the value of Reagan's; then, in 1945, Johnson scored second place in the *Motion Picture Herald* poll of top Hollywood stars. Reagan never cracked the top ten.

He overheard the name "Jane Wyman" around town more frequently, too. A fan magazine began a new series letting its women readers imagine themselves in the lives of female stars; "Let's Pretend You're Mrs. Ronald Reagan" depicted her positively thriving in a husband's absence—"from being Jane Wyman, supporting player, to Jane Wyman, star." The former light-comic ingenue gave an Oscar-worthy performance in 1945 as the girlfriend of a desperate alcoholic in *The Lost Weekend*. "Our Child Must Not Hate," a magazine primer on how to raise children during a war, featured Jane Wyman's byline, and a subhead that made her husband the afterthought: "A new 'mother' code—one every man will support as strongly as Ronald Reagan." Another piece framed Jane as a feminist heroine ("The assumption that the place of every woman is in the home is obsolete"), and ran a family picture with Dutch barely even in the background. "Oh, Janie, dear, you're doing so well now," movie colony gossip recorded a friend of hers gushing. "Is it true that when you went to a restaurant the other night the waiter said, 'What does Captain Wyman want?'"

And then, one night, Reagan left the exclusive Hollywood bistro Ciro's an hour before Jane Wyman, at which she danced with Van Johnson. According to the gossip item the next morning, she was seen "looking into Van's eyes."

And then, one day, passing a radio, he overheard an announcement: "Ladies and gentlemen, the war in Europe is over." His response, as he remembered it for a 1985 interview, was curious: "I felt a chill, as if a gust of cold wind had just swept past." The rest of the nation was jubilant. But it was almost as if he felt afraid to face the rest of his life.

MODERN SCREEN: "HE'S BACK IN TWEEDS AGAIN, IS EX-CAPT. RONALD Reagan, and still tops with fans after three years in service." Which was how fan magazines worked: in close consultation with studio publicists, they told the stories Hollywood wanted told about itself. Even if they were not true. Warner Bros. didn't call Reagan back to the set to shoot a picture for another six months. The picture, a melodrama slated for Bogart and Bacall, *Stallion Road,* had been downgraded to a low-budget black-and-white. And it wasn't released for two years.

The motion picture business was changing. The Justice Department went after a source of Hollywood's monopoly power: the chains of theaters each studio owned, which had to show all the pictures the studio shoveled at them whether local audiences wanted to see those pictures or not. In 1940 the two sides agreed to the "Paramount Decree," meant to break that system up, driving picture volume down; that same year Warners shut down the Foy Unit. By the end of the war Warners was making but twenty movies a year where it used to make sixty—which amplified the value of "superstars," who could earn their keep making but two "prestige" pictures a year. Reagan's dazzling seven-year contract, $3,500 a week for five pictures a year, was now a relic—and Henry Fonda, after returning from hard service overseas in the Navy ("I don't want to be in a fake war in a studio," he had insisted), won a contract worth $6,000 a week to make only one movie a year. Reliable stock players who showed up sober and on time no longer counted for much.

Joy Hodges had advised Reagan that a key to success in the movie colony was playing the political game. He had played it like an obedient boy. More and more actors had complained of the unceasing indignities of star manufacture: the poking, the prodding, the flacking, the twenty-four-hour nature of the job, from the shooting days that "started" at seven (actually six, for you had to show up on set looking perfect) to the "breaks" taken standing against ironing boards to keep costumes from wrinkling (you "relaxed" on set only for staged photo shoots) to the fake "dates." Then there were the contracts themselves, in which refusal to take an assigned roll was punished by a six-month penalty tacked onto the end of a contract. *Gone With the Wind* star Olivia de Havilland filed suit against the practice in 1943, under California's indentured servitude law, and won.

But Reagan never complained. He worked earnestly and doggedly at building relations with fans—a free gift to the studio and its bottom line. He gave his mother—"Moms Nelle" in the argot of the fan club—a full-time job handling mail. A Reagan fan newsletter began publication in 1940; typical article: "I have met Ronald and his dear mother several times. They are both the most thoughtful and sweetest persons a body could ever meet . . . a 'regular guy'!" One enthusiastic correspondent, Lorraine Makler, started writing to him in 1943. He wrote to her as if she were a friend—and, soon, with her husband, Elwood Wagner, she indeed became one of his best friends.

The devotion he was inspiring was epic. So was his own devotion to the Hollywood grind. He was perfect star material. So ***why wouldn't they let him be a star?***

Errol Flynn was a star. Errol Flynn, who rarely showed up for work sober, or free of bruises from fights—a severe frustration for the cinematographers seeking angles for close-ups. Errol Flynn, infamous for on-set tantrums, for upstaging other actors—like Ronald Reagan, in one of his few featured scenes in *Santa Fe Trail.* Even when Flynn gave Hollywood its worst public relations black eye in a generation when he went on trial for statutory rape, in 1943, he still stayed a star—starring as an RAF pilot in *Desperate Journey,* playing above Reagan, even though he collapsed twice on set, forcing the picture over budget.

Jane Wyman was also a star. Two months after V-J day she was on the front page of the *Los Angeles Times* B section in a big pinup spread. The accompanying article, by the *Times'* drama editor, lauded her emergence as a great actress, announcing her work in *The Yearling* as an old woman, acting without makeup, wearing burlap.

Ronald Reagan was not a star. He got a photo spread, too, around that time—as a Hollywood househusband: "The Reagans—Ronnie (Dutch), sprout Maureen (Mermy)—have the place to themselves while mom Jane Wyman is on location for MGM's *The Yearling.* And do they keep busy! . . . Parcheesi is Mermy's racket, but Ronnie isn't throwing the game to be acknowledged champ without a struggle. . . . It's a good thing he's at work in *Stallion Road*—the guy would be plumb wore out with a little more of this relaxation."

But *Stallion Road* wouldn't be released for more than a year. When that excruciating wait finally ended, he complained bitterly to Lorraine Wagner that the industry shot itself in the foot by not releasing movies in color (his reactions to his professional misfortunes were frequently to blame them on what he claimed were poor business practices). It was four years since he'd last appeared on a motion picture screen. If he hadn't been auditioning a new identity in which to assert himself, he might have gone just about insane.

THE FLYER SHOWED A GENIE RISING FROM A MUSHROOM CLOUD. THE caption read, "ATOMIC ENERGY—SLAVE OR MASTER?" The event was scheduled for December 12, 1945, and Reagan was to feature alongside Congresswoman Helen Gahagan Douglas and the sentimental liberal radio star Norman Corwin—although, since the ad ended up on Jack Warner's desk first, and one of the sponsors was a leader of the Communist Political Association in Los Angeles, there was some question if Reagan would appear.

"We feel that such a performance on your part would be in violation of the exclusive rights to your services as granted under to us under your employment contract," read the telegram posted to Reagan from Warner Bros.' legal department. Lew Wasserman called Warners executives the next day to reassure them Reagan wouldn't be anywhere near the thing. Reagan went anyway—then fired a broadside at his staunchly Republican boss. "REAGAN DEFENDS ACTOR'S RIGHT TO VOICE AN OPINION," read the headline of Associated Press Hollywood correspondent Bob Thomas's column six weeks later. "I didn't recall that he had been a political thinker," Thomas wrote, "and I asked him if this was a development of the war." Reagan responded: "Before the war I did a lot of talking about politics, but mostly in back rooms. Now that I have seen what war means, I am more determined that my sons won't have to fight a third world war." (At that point he had only one son, Michael, whom he and Wyman adopted in 1945.) He continued: "Some people think an actor should keep his mouth shut. I think that is wrong. An actor should be careful to know that no group is using him for a selfish purpose, but if he sincerely believes in something he should use his voice."

The article also said Jane Wyman was merely "tolerant" of his "new political life." She was quoted complaining that the phone had rung sixteen times with political calls that morning. "Ronnie is a former sports announcer," she said, "and you know how they love to talk."

By the spring his political life was as busy as his screen life was fallow. In March he joined Gregory Peck, Edward G. Robinson, two Democratic congressmen, and the celebrated bass-baritone Paul Robeson on the sponsoring committee of a dinner at the Roosevelt Hotel for the Los Angeles Committee for a Democratic Far Eastern Policy; in April he served as toastmaster for the Americans Veterans Committee's state convention, where the liberal group resolved for United Nations control of atomic energy, the worldwide abolition of forced military conscription, and an end to racially restrictive covenants in housing; in May he joined the executive council of the Hollywood Independent Citizens Committee of the Arts, Sciences and Professions (HICCASP), along with Olivia de Havilland, James Roosevelt, and producer Dore Schary. It had been chartered as a counterweight to the anti–New Deal group the Motion Picture Alliance for the Preservation of American Ideals—which had been formed by, well, people like Reagan's boss, Jack Warner.

Jack Warner wasn't the only concerned party who noticed. Now that human beings had the power to destroy the earth—"stealing God's stuff," as the *New Yorker*'s E. B. White called it—atomic energy's scientist-inventors felt a special responsibility to advocate politically for its control. The new Federation of Atomic Scientists unveiled a book, *One World or None*, at a November 1945 press conference in the Capitol Hill office of Helen Gahagan Douglas, arguing that atomic development "should be in harmony with an international system of control and cooperation and should further provide for scientific freedom and peacetime utilization of atomic energy in the interests of the whole people"—the position advanced at the December 12, 1945, nuclear rally that Jack Warner so desperately did not want Ronald Reagan to attend.

International control of atomic energy, however, was also the policy solution advocated by another American political faction: Communists. In April 1946, it was among the resolutions issued by a "National Committee to Win the Peace" in Washington, D.C. The other resolutions included a demand to remove Herbert Hoover as honorary chairman of an emergency famine relief committee, a call for the new United Nations Security Council to denounce the Spanish fascist Franco, and calls for an end to General MacArthur's "one-man rule of Japan," and for full employment legislation, the extension of Social Security, and the establishment of a national health insurance system. The last paragraph of the Associated Press dispatch on the meeting noted that "five of 20 members of Congress listed as sponsors before the conference was held asked that their names be withdrawn." Cryptic—unless you were reading the tea leaves of America's impending Cold War. For if the above positions were generally congruent with broad liberal opinion, other resolutions at the meeting—denunciation of recent government statements "which appear to be aimed at the embarrassment of the Soviet Union," and a request to the State to Department to "maintain and extend friendly cooperation" with Russia instead—pointed in a more controversial direction.

The Soviet Union had just sacrificed some 20 million of its citizens to vanquish Hitler, in alliance with the United States. In 1943, after the Germans retreated following the awful siege of Stalingrad, Warner Bros. produced *Mission to Moscow* at President Roosevelt's personal request. It portrayed America's new ambassador to the Soviet Union in his journey from skepticism to enthusiasm for the Communist state. At its gala premiere at Washington's Earle Theater (in the afternoon, to accommodate the wartime blackout), an audience of 4,400 that included cabinet members and senators raised "a burst of applause," the *Washington Post* reported, "that ended only when the theater orchestra drowned it out with the finale." MGM produced *Song of Russia* and *The North Star,* idealized portraits of angelic Russians standing up to barbarian Germans. *Life* devoted its entire March 29 issue to hymning the USSR's glories. ("They live under a system of tight state-controlled information. But probably the attitude to take toward it is not to get too excited about it.") That November some six thousand rallied at Los Angeles's Shrine Auditorium to celebrate the tenth anniversary of normalized U.S.-Soviet relations. The next year Bette Davis cut a birthday cake, with twenty-six candles and inscribed TO OUR GALLANT RUSSIA, with a ceremonial Kazakh sword to honor the twenty-sixth anniversary of the Red Army.

And then, in March 1946, British prime minister Winston Churchill traveled to the small town of Fulton, Missouri, to describe how the lands under Soviet military control following Germany's surrender had fallen behind an "iron curtain" of tyranny—and all of a sudden, with the speed of a swerve in a Communist Party line, the taint of association with the Soviet Union was something all Americans were to avoid on pain of ostracization from decent society or worse.

The problem was discerning where that taint lived.

The history of the Communist Party in the United States was morally complicated: under its Depression-era "Popular Front" strategy, Communists were anodyne bearers of a garden-variety liberalism—while upholding one position that was not anodyne at all: they were the only organized force in white American political life who said black Americans deserved equal rights. In 1940s Hollywood, that hothouse of moral preening, cocktail parties dedicated to the fight against Spanish fascism, to freedom for Chinese sharecroppers, and civil rights, under the sponsorship of the "Communist Political Association" (the party's wartime name), were the places for up-and-coming thespians to see and be seen. "They had not the remotest idea of what Communism was in terms of economic structures of political superstates," *Reader's Digest*'s Communism expert, Eugene Lyons, wrote later. "For nearly all of them, it was an intoxicated state of mind, a glow of inner virtue, and a sort of comradeship in super-charity."

Then peace, and a swerve. Communist leader Earl Browder, who had said that "capitalism and socialism have begun to find their way to peaceful coexistence and collaboration in the same world," was purged; the party reorganized on a Cold War footing and began maliciously infiltrating liberal organizations. It also organized front groups—like the National Committee to Win the Peace. The resolutions at its April 1946 meeting marked that group to those in the know as a Communist front. Which is why five of twenty congressmen sponsoring the meeting dropped out—while the fact that fifteen stayed showed how in flux the situation truly was.

These were complexities to which Ronald Reagan had apparently not given a thought. J. Edgar Hoover, who testified that March that Communism was not a political party but "a condition akin to a disease that spreads like an epidemic, and like an epidemic, quarantine is necessary to keep it from infecting the nation," was also immune to such complexities. His FBI eagerly took the coincidence of positions between liberal idealists and Communist subversives as prima facie evidence of infection, and drew no distinction between groups that seemed genuinely to have begun as Moscow fronts and those, such as the American Veterans Committee, that Communists merely wished to infiltrate. As for HICCASP, an FBI report said, "Every endorsement of public officials made by this organization coincides exactly with that made by the Communist Party of the state."

THE FACT THAT RONALD REAGAN WAS A PRINCIPAL IN ALL THESE groups—and also narrator of *Operation Terror,* a thirteen-part radio series exposing the Ku Klux Klan and sponsored by the Hollywood Writers Mobilization, a Communist front—explained why two FBI agents showed up at Reagan's doorstep one day for the encounter that would change his life forever.

The agents announced themselves at the sprawling modern ranch house he had built for himself and his wife, perched high above Sunset

Boulevard at the bend of a cul-de-sac and an endless curving driveway, with either the ocean or the twinkling valley spread dramatically before any window he cared to peer out of. He remembered serving the FBI agents coffee. "We have some information which might be useful to you," Reagan reported one of them saying, in his memoir *Where's the Rest of Me?* "We thought you might have some information helpful to us."

Reagan then depicted himself introducing a morally complicating factor, a scruple about civil liberties: "Now look, I don't go in for Red-baiting."

Thereupon he depicted the moral complexity melting in the space of a few lines.

G-Man #1: "You served with the Air Corps. You know what spies and saboteurs are."

G-Man #2: "We thought someone the Communists hated as much as they hate you might be willing to help us."

"That got me," he wrote.

"What did they say about me?"

"The exact quotation was: 'What are we going to do about that sonofabitching bastard Reagan?' Will that do for openers?"

He was convinced. From then on he was to be a warrior in a struggle of good versus evil—a battle for the soul of the world.

SOMEWHERE AROUND THIS TIME—THE CHRONOLOGY HAS NEVER BEEN quite clear—Reagan attended a HICCASP board meeting in which all the subtleties of liberal politics in an age of Communist infiltration were aired in a wide-ranging debate. James Roosevelt, the son of the late president, said it was time groups like theirs became more "vigilant against being used by Communist sympathizers." Which, however, meant what? The ranks of such sympathizers had always thinned in the wake of each party-line shift; by the time Earl Browder was purged, there were hardly any Communists left in Hollywood. Wouldn't the attempt to smoke out what few remained turn their group into an ineffectual nest of recrimination? If some random screenwriter agreed that atomic energy should be placed under international control, did that make him fit to be purged? Then so was Albert Einstein—and maybe even Harry Truman, who had said three days after Hiroshima, "We must constitute ourselves trustees of this new force . . . and . . . turn it into the channels of service to mankind."

Reagan rejected the complexity. Alongside Olivia de Havilland, he put a resolution up for a vote at the next meeting: "We reaffirm belief in free enterprise and the democratic system and repudiate Communism as desirable for the United States." (Planning their move, de Havilland and Reagan each pronounced themselves surprised that the other wasn't a secret Communist.) Screenwriters Dalton Trumbo and John Howard Lawson argued against it, because they were Communists. Others, like bandleader Artie Shaw, opposed it on civil liberties grounds. The resolution was voted down. "It was all the proof we needed," Reagan said. "HICCASP had become a Communist front organization, hiding behind a few well-intentioned Hollywood celebrities to give it credibility."

His math did not add up. Lawson and Trumbo represented but one position in an argument that had at least three sides; there were plenty of reasons to vote down the resolution besides some submerged desire for the hammer and sickle to fly over the White House. But the Manichaean logic of Communists and dupes was now how Ronald Reagan thought—and, enraged at having been one of the dupes, he gave the Communists no quarter.

Reagan and de Havilland resigned from HICCASP, but not before Reagan cast himself in a real-life adventure movie: he absconded with the records of the group, and—in a midnight rendezvous at a hamburger stand with his brother, also an FBI informant—claimed to have found in them a plot to deploy an obscure membership regulation to neutralize the power of anti-Communist members; this, Reagan said, was the only reason his resolution could possibly have been voted down.

THAT MANICHAEAN DISPOSITION SOON TURNED OUT TO BE VERY USEFUL to the barons who ruled Hollywood, and who were at that moment badly on the ropes.

Hollywood might be slightly more glamorous. But given its intensely time-sensitive production routines, economically speaking, the dream factory was little different from a fish market (fish rotted by the minute; movie labor costs ballooned by the minute). Which was why Hollywood had something in common with the Brooklyn docks: its unions were controlled by mobbed-up bosses who amassed enormous power by threatening to shut the whole operation down in an instant with the snap of their chubby fingers.

The union that thus controlled Hollywood's dozens of craft locals was the International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees, or "IA." It also represented the theater projectionists—everywhere, so a studio that crossed the IA was in danger of losing its entire revenue stream nationwide if the IA's union bosses ordered those projectionists off the job. And one way to cross the IA was to refuse the endless kickbacks, bribes, and featherbedding schemes it demanded. Studio bosses, however, had few problems cooperating, the devil they knew being so useful to them in keeping their workers in line.

In 1941 the IA suffered a setback when its leader, George Browne, and his enforcer, Willie Bioff, an associate of Al Capone's, were sentenced to eight and ten years, respectively, for extortion. Meanwhile, Browne's slightly less corrupt successor, Roy Brewer, fought off an annoyance on his left flank: another labor outfit bidding to represent his workers by promising them actual, honest-to-God integrity—and better wages and hours. The rival organization was called the Conference of Studio Unions (CSU), and its leader was an extraordinary figure. Herbert Sorrell was a former amateur boxer who first got a job painting a movie set in 1925, attended his first union meeting because he heard that the union served illegal beer, and stayed because he loved what unions did at their best—win better lives for regular guys who just wanted to give their kids chances they themselves never got. "We were not out to kill the goose that laid the golden egg," as he put it in settling a 1933 strike, "but we were out to get as many of them as we could."

He also wanted to do something else: prove a union could be run democratically. Bioff offered him $56,000 to stop trying to raid IA locals. No dice; years later, Sorrell told a congressional hearing, "I think you should pass legislation that labor leaders who accept bribes... should be shot." And he was hardly less tough than the mobsters who enforced for the IA. He just deployed violence to different ends. When in March 1945 his CSU called a three-day walkout on behalf of set dressers who'd been barred from disaffiliating from the IA, and the IA's president wired its projectionists to stop working so the ruin of an entire industry could be laid at Herb Sorrell's feet, he just laughed. "I have no fear of anybody," he said. "I don't fear the hereafter, and I don't fear no thugs, and I don't fear anybody or anything and I will take mine as it comes.... I don't want to be attacked because I will attack back." He won that strike, after thirty-four weeks—and kept on raiding IA jurisdictions. Brewer, meanwhile, tightened his dictatorial grip on his nineteen thousand members and girded for war.

Thus the order of battle: two union federations, one corrupt, the other clean, both prepared for violence, both fighting for the very same prize—the right to represent Hollywood's tens of thousands of production workers. The scene was set for a years-long drama of exceptional complexity—except, of course, to Ronald Reagan, who had looked into Roy Brewer's soul and found him a hero, and into Herb Sorrell's and found a dirty Communist rat.

The CSU's strategy was to charge that workers represented by the IA were doing jobs that rightfully did not belong to them. The American Federation of Labor, called upon to adjudicate the jurisdictional dispute, sent a panel of "Three Wise Men" from the postal workers' union, the barbers' union, and the trainmen's union to referee. Sorrell, meanwhile, called an escalating series of work stoppages through the winter, spring, and summer of 1946. The campaign ended in triumph, with a 25 percent increase in base pay for all production workers—including those represented by the IA—and the first guaranteed full workweek in movie history. It was not enough to endear him to the rival whose monopoly over Hollywood unionism he had broken. Brewer called one of the stoppages leading up to the deal "a last desperate effort to keep Communist control of certain AFL unions in Hollywood." Red-baiting had long been a useful way to destroy enemies in Hollywood—for example, Walt Disney, after Sorrell won a cartoonists' strike against him in 1941, took out a full-page ad in *Variety* braying, "I am positively convinced that Communistic agitation, leadership, and activities have brought about this strike." Shortly after Sorrell's coup in getting a 25 percent raise out of the studios, his enemies—both the studio bosses and the mobbed-up IA—devised an additional way to destroy him.

In September 1946, Americans opened their papers to see extraordinary images: billy clubs, smashed windows, stoned buses, and overturned cars in the place where dreams were made. Ronald Reagan's beloved Hollywood was a war zone. By November, it got even worse: CSU picketers, bearing flyers reading, "Our purpose here is to keep the scabs out and to close the studio down," defied a court ruling keeping them two hundred feet from the gates of Columbia Pictures. Their defiance led to the largest mass arrests in California history. "If it ain't worth going to jail for it ain't worth fighting for!" Herb Sorrell told newsmen as he was led off. His thousands of loyalists cheered—and then, crowded together in the Lincoln Heights lockup, chanted, "We don't want bail, we like this jail!" Los Angeles's overwhelmingly right-wing press knew whom to blame. "RED BID REPORTED," ran the headline above the *Los Angeles Times*' account of the arrests.

Ronald Reagan's political passions had by then found a new channel: the Screen Actors Guild. He showed up in that article addressing a meeting alongside the president of the IA to protest the firebombing of the homes of workers who had crossed the picket lines, allegedly by the CSU, and expressing "gratitude to law enforcement officers for protection given them in their right to work as non-striking union members."

He didn't always quite grasp what unionism was all about—his appearance at a right-to-work meeting demonstrated that. Though at that, SAG was a curious sort of union. Founded in 1933 with a tiny membership of eighty that quickly grew to more than four thousand after the producers formed a cartel among themselves and agreed not to bid competitively for talent, the union impressively pledged itself to help established actors and up-and-comers equally, and signed a pioneering collective bargaining agreement in 1937, a model of union solidarity—but by the end of World War II its leadership was larded with conservative Republicans (George Murphy, the song-and-dance man known as the "Irish Fred Astaire"; Robert Montgomery, who became Reagan's best friend) at a time when the dominant agenda item on the Republican right was destroying the bargaining power of unions.

Reagan rose to the Screen Actors Guild's second vice presidency. In October 1946, the guild voted 2,748 to 509 not to honor the CSU's picket line. The vote was the result of a letter sent to members maintaining that both sides were equally to blame. The CSU called that position "phony impartiality"—claiming that SAG was actually taking the side of management, by coming to the aid of what was effectively a union controlled by the company, not the workers. In public, Reagan aggressively pushed the position that neutrality was the only moral stance. He came to another conclusion privately. It was not that the CSU was equally to blame: it was that they were captive to the Red conspiracy. "The Communist plan for Hollywood was remarkably simple," he wrote in his 1965 memoir. "We had a weekly audience of about 500 million souls. Takeover of this enormous plant and its gradual transformation into a Communist gristmill was a grandiose idea. It would have been a magnificent coup for our enemies. . . . Using the CSU as a vehicle for Communist aims, was a first step of admirable directness." In Ronald Reagan's mind, for a movie actor to show up on set thus made him a frontline hero in the long twilight struggle between freedom and slavery. Honoring the picket line would have made him a stooge of Moscow. Which certainly suggests why he supported neutrality in the strike.

Even if he *himself* had no set to show up on, he showed up instead in Bob Thomas's gossip column: "It looks as though Errol Flynn is set for *Frontiersman*. . . . That's too bad because the role was much wanted by another star who appears to be the least temperamental on the Warner lot—Ronald Reagan. Sometimes temperamental pays off?" Nine days later, he was mentioned in the column again—this time in an item about all the work Jane Wyman was getting: "Says husband Ronald Reagan, her home lot is the only studio that hasn't discovered her."

At least he got to enjoy a real-life role straight out of film noir. One day, he recalled being summoned to a pay phone at a service station.

"'There's a group being formed to deal with you. They're going to fix you so you won't ever act again.'

"I took it as a joke," he wrote. "When I got back to Warner's I found they took it very seriously. The police were waiting with a license to carry a gun. I was fitted with a shoulder holster and a loaded 32 Smith & Wesson."

He stuck to his script even as evidence bulked that it made little sense. A Jesuit priest from Loyola University in Chicago, Father George Dunne, traveled to California to mediate between the IA and CSU. He found the CSU's Herb Sorrell conciliatory. He found the IA's Roy Brewer little more than a criminal thug. Brewer told the priest, "The Conference of Studio Unions was born in destruction and will die in destruction." In January 1947 Father Dunne announced that the CSU "had justice on their side" and that if only the Screen Actors Guild would follow its "moral obligation" to stop going to work, the strike could be over in a day. He recalled in an oral history what happened next: the guild's second vice president, Ronald Reagan, traveled to his Chicago rectory to argue "that Herb Sorrell and the CSU and all these people were Communists, and this was a Communist-led and inspired strike and that I was simply being a dupe for the Communists."

Shortly after Reagan's visit to Chicago, in March 1947, Sorrell was kidnapped by men dressed up as police, beaten, and left to die in the desert—by, a studio labor relations executive later revealed, Chicago gangsters working for Brewer. Reagan still held fast to his conviction that Brewer was unsullied—even after, upon Sorrell's miraculous return, alive, Sorrell once more embraced reconciliation, accepting an arbitration proposal that included major concessions from his union. Los Angeles's conservative diocese newspaper the *Tidings* begged the IA and management to accept, complaining that the producers "have taken a most negative attitude by doing little to settle the dispute . . . with cries of Communism and radicalism."

Their refusal to settle, in fact, began to seem almost inscrutable—until, later that year, a congressman from Pennsylvania named Carroll D. Kearns held extraordinarily detailed hearings on the dispute. One fact that emerged was that Herb Sorrell was *despised* by actual Hollywood Communists, who considered him something like a traitor, and that the producers' own in-house labor relations expert, a right-winger named Pat Casey, said of the CSU leadership, "I do not know of one that I would say was a Communist." ("My God, I have heard

'Communist, Communist, Communist,'" Casey testified in annoyance. "It gets down to where if you do not agree with somebody, you are a Communist.")

Another fact that emerged was that both sides were not equally culpable in this war at all. One day the hearings were rocked by a bombshell: someone introduced leaked minutes of a series of meetings that proved the violence beginning in September 1946 had been deliberately induced by the movie studios and the IA, conspiring to crush the Conference of Studio Unions. The plan had been to unilaterally replace CSU carpenters, building sets in accordance with a compromise arrived at by the "Three Wise Men," with IA carpenters. When the CSU threw up picket lines in response, Teamsters were to truck IA carpenters through the lines. (The Teamster who led the operation was rewarded with a studio executive position.) That, in words quoted from instructions to all studio department heads, would "create an incident." "Assign someone to see no damage is done to the electric generators," ran another part of the instructions; thereupon friendly police, sheriffs, and the district attorney's office would frame the CSU as violent extremists—which is exactly what had happened. In November, six CSU leaders had been charged with criminal conspiracy "to commit acts to pervert and obstruct" the law and "commit assault with a deadly weapon and to commit extortion"—but no charges were issued against the equally violent IA.

The Screen Actors Guild was in on the conspiracy. The same document named a SAG staff member as observing that it was "advisable not to have stars see the picket line broken—but to hold them somewhere until they can enter the studio peacefully."

Reagan probably hadn't been in on the plotting. But shortly after Father Dunne proposed his mediated settlement and a week after Sorrell's kidnapping, Reagan was chosen as interim Screen Actors Guild president. The marquee Hollywood columnist Hedda Hopper recounted that when the old president, hunky Robert Montgomery, informed her he was leaving the office, Montgomery said, "Whatever you do, don't sell my successor short. He's a brilliant, earnest man whose heart and mind are in the right places." She wrote, "Then I almost gasped when he named the fellow as Ronald Reagan." She soon changed her mind, she related: he handled the strike "with courage and intelligence." Hopper, a dyed-in-the-wool conservative who deeply identified with studio management, had reason to think so. In his new role, his greatest passion became blocking impartial arbiters such as the Catholic archdiocese, the National Labor Relations Board, and an interfaith council of Los Angeles divines from settling the conflict.

Impartial mediation would have allowed the CSU to survive, where the IA and industry sought to crush it. Did Reagan intend this? Was he serving the studio heads' malicious designs? In his testimony to the Kearns Committee, Father Dunne offered a theory: "There is a certain mentality in the leadership of the Screen Actors Guild which is a producer's mentality, rather than a workingman's mentality." He singled out Reagan by name: "His interest as an actor naturally tends, it seems to me, subconsciously to coincide with the producers." Garry Wills, in his book about Reagan, offered another suggestion: that he may have been simply oblivious that his refusal of outside mediation made him the producers' cat's-paw—that he "knew nothing of the plans that had been concerted to break the CSU."

Either way, the result is the same. A very Ronald Reagan result—one strikingly similar to his achievement in another complex dispute, nineteen years earlier. As a freshman at Eureka College he had in just this way reduced the fog of bureaucratic war into a crystal simplicity, claiming his faction's "policy of polite resistance" had united the campus once and for all, purged a villain, and saved the university, bestowed upon all and sundry an "education in human nature and the rights of man to universal education that nothing could erase from our psyches." The gift he provided to his fellow Screen Actors Guild members was similar. Many of them wished to see themselves as liberals, but also just wanted to keep on making movies, not go on strike. What he gave them was a story that turned them into moral innocents instead of scabs. He soon won nomination for a full term as Screen Actors Guild president. He made others feel good.

Except, as ever, those who considered him a fraud and a joke—like a Canadian actor named Alexander Knox, who took the podium at a SAG mass meeting deciding whether to honor the picket line and proceeded to parody its president as a simpleton. "Reagan spoke very fast," Knox later reflected. "He always did, so that he could talk out of both sides of his mouth at once."

MEANWHILE, THERE WAS THAT ACTING CAREER. FATHER DUNNE SAID AT the hearings that it "very clearly would have been injured had he taken the other stand." But that wasn't the case at all. Reagan's career appeared beyond salvation, whatever political stand he did or did not take.

Jack Warner had praised Reagan as "a tower of strength, not only for the actors but for the whole industry" in the strike. It didn't keep Warners from promptly casting Reagan in the worst movie of his career, *That Hagen Girl*, starring Reagan alongside Shirley Temple in her first grown-up role. The newly married Temple, who insisted on being called "Mrs. Agar," looked like a little girl playing dress-up. Reagan played her romantic interest. A *Hollywood Citizen* correspondent visited the set, where the "handsome actor and president of the Screen Actors Guild makes no secret of the fact that he yearns to gallop over movie prairies." The correspondent quoted his complaint, "We are making too many 'parlor stories.' Moviegoers have enough of their own problems today. When they go to see pictures they want some entertainment that will take them out of their own locale and away from their troubles," and then noted, "Ronnie thinks the Western is the answer."

Actually Westerns were Hollywood's most prevalent genre. Though he had an answer to that as well. "'Too often,' he lamented, 'producers will take a story and set it in the outdoors in an attempt to label it a Western. That isn't the way to do it.'

"His suggestion: look into American history, where many unmoviefied characters with interesting and exciting stories are still hidden. But steer clear of the Civil War, he advised, because there can only be but one ending to such a picture. Even Hollywood can't change that."

And *Hollywood Citizen* reported on his "campaign to escape Warners temporarily to play 'Only the Valiant,' a story of the Indian War which is owned by the Cagneys." But that campaign failed. Nowadays the only place he was starring was behind the podiums.

He skipped his thirty-sixth birthday dinner to give a speech for Truman's housing program; spoke at a fan banquet for baseball stars (the papers identified him as "Ronald Reagan of the movies"—as if readers might not know who he was); emceed the Oscars alongside Jack Benny; helmed a dinner honoring school superintendents; then, still waiting for *Stallion Road* to debut, addressed the convention of the International Association of Y's Men's Clubs. ("As we enjoy the rights and privileges of American citizenship, we must acknowledge a corresponding duty to safeguard those rights to everyone lest they be lost to all . . . and give the bum's rush to the notorious hucksters whenever and wherever they may be found.") And when a Harvard sociologist said the nation was harmed by the "synthetic childless population" and "disintegrated people in Hollywood," it was Reagan, his wife pregnant with their third child, who rose for the defense: "If the professor could be persuaded to leave the cloistered halls where intellectual inbreeding substitutes for the 'synthetic' life of Hollywood, I believe we could show him that the people in the studios, gathered from the cities, towns, and farms, are a pretty good cross section of American life, no worse, no better."

In May 1947 Hedda Hopper published an appreciation of Reagan as a reasonable liberal. "I believe the only logical way to save our country from all extremists," he said, "is to remove conditions that supply fuel for the totalitarian fire. . . . The Reds know that if we can make America a decent living place for all of our people, their cause is lost here." He also said, "I'm not in favor of banning any political party. If we ban the Communists from the polls we set a dangerous precedent. Tomorrow it may be the Democratic or Republican Party that gets the ax. Rather than ban the party, we should force all issues into the open."

These were the standard liberal anti-Communist positions. They were also radically disingenuous. Only one month earlier, Reagan had once more invited two FBI agents into his home. He told them two of his rivals on the SAG board (who were also rivals of each other) "follow the Communist Party line." Then he singled out eight more suspected Communists—including Alexander Knox, the actor who had mocked him at the SAG meeting.

J. Parnell Thomas, the fearsome chair of the House Committee on Un-American Activities, set up shop at the Biltmore Hotel to hold secret hearings on Communist infiltration of Hollywood. That hinge in Hollywood history was followed by yet another hinge in Reagan's own. In June, after plunging into a river to rescue Shirley Temple's character from a suicide attempt, he contracted viral pneumonia. He was resting at Cedars of Lebanon Hospital on June 26 when his wife gave birth three months prematurely—at a hospital three miles away. Hedda Hopper rushed to print to report the child's condition was "satisfactory." But the child, whom the parents named Christine, was dead by the time the column appeared. Reagan would never acknowledge that his wife gave birth. Instead he called it a miscarriage, blaming it on his wife's overwork.

JANE WYMAN WAS WORKING HARD, AND EXTRAORDINARILY WELL. FOR *The Yearling* she was nominated for Best Supporting Actress. For her next picture, *Johnny Belinda*, she prepared to play a deaf-mute by studying sign language, learning lip reading, and, not satisfied that she knew what it was like to *feel* deaf, wearing wax earplugs for hours at a time and spending days in isolation, deliberately terrifying herself. "I Broke Myself Down for *Johnny Belinda*," she wrote in an exceptional article in the *Los Angeles Mirror*—a particular challenge, she said, because there was "nothing groping or uncertain about me. I'm pretty much of a girl who knows her own mind. I've taught myself to make decisions. It's the story of any career woman."

Her husband's acting method, contrastingly, had been recently described by "Hollywood Is My Beat" columnist Sidney Skolsky: "He studies his role by merely sitting down in a comfortable chair and reading and rereading the script until he knows it." Soon after, Dutch attended a preview screening of *That Hagen Girl*. When the audience moaned as he kissed Shirley Temple, he sank down in his chair, then snuck out before the lights went up. (The kiss was cut from the final edit.)

The marriage was falling apart. Jane Wyman was not shy about telling the world she came by these portrayals of lonely women honestly; everyone in Hollywood by then knew that Reagan never shut up, and that Wyman called him "diarrhea mouth." At a dinner party at Dick Powell and June Allyson's house, George Murphy tried to talk him into becoming a Republican. Allyson asked Reagan a question; the answer went on and on, until Wyman leaned over and whispered, "Don't ask Ronnie what time it is because he will tell you how a watch is made." Allyson replied, jokingly, "He'll outgrow it." Wyman didn't laugh.

She had also made no secret to friends that Reagan had once responded to one of her periodic melancholy fugues with "We'll have an ideal life if you'll avoid doing one thing: don't think." When *Johnny Belinda* was shot on location in a remote stretch of Mendocino County, just after the death of their infant daughter, she befriended her costar Lew Ayres, an extraordinary figure who had published an open letter in 1942 announcing he was a conscientious objector. (A front-page editorial in the *Hollywood Reporter* begged the public not to blame the motion picture industry for the heresy.) They would disappear for long conversations about the meaning of life, and Hollywood gossip linked them romantically. Reagan promptly visited the set—as if to spy on this coward his true love was choosing over him.

Then, he had to leave. For a crucial appointment beckoned.

The CSU had been crushed. The brass launched the studio on a new project. The Motion Picture Alliance for the Preservation of American Ideals, the coalition of right-wing actors and executives launched in 1944 to combat "the growing impression that the industry is made up of, and dominated by, Communists, radicals, and crackpots," joined forces with the House Un-American Activities Committee to purge the Communists, radicals, and crackpots once and for all. HUAC's chief Hollywood investigator, Allen Smith, who had grown up in Dixon, recommended Reagan be summoned as a "friendly" witness. "He has no fear of anyone and is a nice talker," he reported. "He is of course reticent to testify, because he states that he is a New Deal Liberal, and does not agree with a number of individuals in the Motion Picture Alliance. I believe we straightened him out on a number of differences."

"Hearings Regarding the Communist Infiltration of the Motion Picture Industry" opened in Washington on October 20, 1947, with testimony from the friendly witnesses. The urbane, mustachioed Adolphe Menjou—a far-right ideologue when he wasn't playing well-dressed men-about-town—said that only the "vigilance" of anti-Communists like himself prevented "an enormous amount of sly, subtle, un-American class-struggle propaganda from going into pictures" (though "a communistic actor, even if he were under orders from the head of the studio not to inject communism or un-Americanism or subversion into pictures, could easily subvert that order"—by, say, changing the inflection of his voice). A screenwriter said Communists had mastered the art of introducing a "little drop of cyanide in the picture" that "makes every Senator, every business, every employer a crook and which destroys our beliefs in American free enterprise and free institutions." Writer Ayn Rand had written a guidebook to help producers on the lookout for such surreptitious Communism. (Make sure your pictures "don't smear wealth"; "don't glorify failure"; "don't deify the 'common man.'") At the hearings, she took on *Song of Russia*, that supposedly innocent effort to help defeat Hitler, for daring to depict Soviet citizens who smiled. Ginger Rogers's mother told of how she had forbidden her daughter to act in the film version of Theodore Dreiser's classic novel *Sister Carrie* because it was "open propaganda." Jack Warner held up a picture of John Lawson on the picket line in the 1945 strike—proving, since Lawson was a Communist, that the strike was only "*supposedly* on account of the carpenters and painters." The IA's John Brewer testified of his hope that "with the help of the committee the Communist menace in the motion picture industry may be destroyed, to the end that Hollywood labor may be spared in the future the strife and turmoil of the immediate past"—the same strife and turmoil he himself had deliberately engineered to break a rival union.

It was absurd, but so were the antics on the other side—for instance when Lawson brought a statement to read calling his accusers "stool pigeons, neurotics, publicity-seeking clowns, Gestapo agents, paid informers, and a few ignorant and frightened Hollywood artists."

On October 23, witness Reagan trod a middle ground. He had recently adopted a new technology, contact lenses, but he put them away for the occasion; his horn-rims imparted a more serious air. In his statement he repeated what he had said to Hedda Hopper: he didn't wish "to see any party outlawed on the basis of its political ideology. We have spent a hundred and seventy years in this country on the basis that democracy is strong enough to stand up and fight against the inroads of any ideology." He closed, "I hope we never are prompted by either fear or resentment of Communism into compromising any of our democratic principles in order to fight it." Having delivered a thoughtful, judicious presentation, he was just about the only person to emerge from the sordid proceedings enhanced.

On the other hand, late in July, SAG executive director Jack Dales, almost certainly with Reagan's cooperation, had helped the FBI confirm the identities of fifty-four people whose names it had obtained in an illegal break-in of a Communist Party office. Indeed, Reagan had already dropped the dime on eight suspects himself.

UPON HIS RETURN FROM WASHINGTON, HIS WIFE GREETED HIM AT THE door: "You bore me! Get out!" It was her first categorical insistence upon a divorce. The next week *That Hagen Girl* came out to ghastly notices—one of which regretted Shirley Temple's suicide attempt failed. "Thanks for being frank regarding *That Hagen Girl*, I know the reviews couldn't say much for it, and only did it to accommodate Warner Bros.," he wrote Lorraine Wagner. "They tried others who refused, so they asked me and I said I knew it wouldn't do anything for me, but they were desperate, so you know 'old easy goin' Reagan.'"

Two weeks later, on November 17, a SAG membership meeting passed a resolution decreeing officers had to sign affidavits stipulating that they were not members of the Communist Party—probably in coordination with the studio executives who, six days later, emerged from the Waldorf hotel in Manhattan to announce that "we will not knowingly employ a Communist," and inviting "the Hollywood talent guilds to work with us to eliminate subversives, to protect the innocent, and to safeguard free speech and a free screen wherever they are threatened."

In December, *Johnny Belinda* completed, Wyman traveled to New York City, where she was quoted in a Hollywood column as saying, "There is no use in lying. I am not the happiest girl in the world. It's an accumulation of things that have been coming a long time," though she hoped that when she saw her husband "we can solve our problem." Reagan learned of the quote upon his return from a shopping trip to buy his wife a fabulous Christmas gift. He promptly ran to Hedda Hopper—whose column the next morning reported, "Ronald Reagan declares he merely had tiff with Jane Wyman in answering queries about reports that they are on verge of separation." And what, she'd asked, was he buying his girl for Christmas? "I'm not going to tell you. If I told you, you'd print it and then it wouldn't be a surprise for her. . . . I'm looking forward to a happy life with Jane for as long as we live."

Two weeks later, Old Easy Goin' Reagan earned a new nickname. According to a report by the FBI, "Confidential Informant T-10" told agents of his "firm conviction" that Congress should outlaw the Communist Party and formally designate groups that were Communist fronts, so that members' disloyalty could be legally established. It was the opposite of what he had told HUAC forty days earlier—but consistent with the studio chiefs' request that Congress "enact legislation to assist American industry to rid itself of subversives." One day around that time, he took a long car trip with his former religion professor at Eureka. "He told me of his marriage troubles and of his troubles with Communists at the Guild," the teacher remembered in 1966, when Reagan the gubernatorial candidate was making his bones by fulminating against the wickedness and moral dissolution of the Berkeley student left. But back in 1947 "he told me that there was a group of women at the University of California who were getting men tied into Communism by charm and sex—virtually prostitutes. He told me that like Lincoln if he ever got a chance to crack that, he'd crack it harder than what he's doing now."

DUTCH'S 1948 WAS RUNG IN WITH A TWO-PAGE SPREAD IN *Photoplay*, "Those Fightin' Reagans": "'It's a strange character I'm married to,' Ronnie announced with a wry but unmistakably tender smile, 'But—I love her. . . . Please remember,' he told us, 'that Jane went through a very bad time when, after the strain of waiting for another baby, she lost it. Then, perhaps before she was strong enough, she went into *Johnny Belinda*. . . . Perhaps, too, my seriousness about public affairs has bored Jane,' he added slowly. 'But you must believe me when I say that, less than six weeks before Jane left for New York, we were happy enough for her to tell me, 'I hope it can always be like this between us.' 'I hope so,' Ronnie said, with an earnestness you could reach out and touch. 'Because I believe we belong together.'" In May, Jane filed for divorce on grounds of "extreme mental cruelty." Her husband didn't attend the June dissolution hearing. Readers of the *Los Angeles Times*, however, did. "Despite her lack of interest in his political activities," the paper said, reporting her argument before the bench, "Reagan insisted that she attend meetings with him and that she be present during discussions